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INDIAN AFTER-DINNER STORIES

VOLUME II

BY

A. S. PANCHAPAKESA AYYAR, M.A. (OXON), I.C.S.

Author of Indian After-Dinner Stories, Vol. I,

In the Clutch of the Devil, Baladitya,

An Indian In Western Europe, etc.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE warm welcome with which the literary critics and the general public received the first volume of the Indian After-Dinner Stories has emboldened me to bring out this second volume. All the stories in this volume are of my own creation. My object here is, as it was before, to provide some healthy laughter and at the same time to shake some of our deep-rooted prejudices by exhibiting them in their comic aspect. We, as a nation, are too sad and serious. That is why we hardly ever see our own absurdities. It is good that we unbend a little now and then, and what time is more suitable for a hearty laugh than that immediately succeeding a hearty dinner? Indian tradition has always favoured the combination of a laugh and a precept to empty laughter. I am therefore only following time-honoured precedent in seeking to combine these two qualities in these stories.

A. S. P. AYYAR.

Indian After-Dinner Stories

VOLUME II

I. THE CHOULTRY-EATER'S USE

THERE was once a young stalwart and intelligent Brahmin who did no work at all but spent his whole time in wandering from choultry¹ to choultry all over the hospitable west coast. One day a prosperous citizen who believed in the dignity and divinity of labour said to him, 'Why do you idle away your time like this? Can't you do some work or other?' The Brahmin replied, 'Why should I work? I have no wife and children. I purposely refrained from marrying lest I should be forced to stay in one place, and, what is infinitely worse, to work. Truly have the ancients said that a wife chains the leg and a child the mouth. Owing to my prudence, I have escaped this awful calamity. By God's grace, I have not got to work even to fill my own belly. The kings and nobles of Kerala² have been, and

¹ A free eating-house for Brahmins.

² Malabar, Cochin and Travancore.

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still are, very considerate. They have filled the whole land with choultries where any Brahmin will get free meals for three days consecutively. And there are choultries every six miles. I regularly travel from one end of Kerala to another by easy stages eating at all the choultries. When I get tired, I settle down for a month or two in those choultries like that of Trivandrum where there is no limit to the number of days a man may stay in. God too has been very considerate towards me. He created me as a Brahmin. But for this favour, I might have had to drudge like others. As it is, I can say with pride and joy that till now I have not earned a single meal by my work. After all, what is work meant for? Is it not to feed oneself and one's dependants? I have no dependants, and the choultries feed me. So, why should I work?'

'But,' put in the other, 'think of the dignity and divinity of labour.' 'My dear fellow,' retorted the Brahmin, 'I have seen too much of the indignity and hellishness of work to think in the way you indicate. How is a scavenger's work dignified or divine? Of course, others may say so, but will the scavenger himself think so? I tell you, all work done for eking out a bare livelihood is undignified and hellish to the doer.'

JANAKI'S SILVER PLATE

No doubt, voluntary work like going round and giving advice to others unsought may be very pleasant and may appear to be both dignified and divine to the persons doing it.' 'But why can't you spend your time usefully? What use is your living like this?' asked the other. 'Well, that depends on one's idea of usefulness. Do you think that a man who helps to secure Heaven for many sinners is useful at all?' asked the Brahmin.

'Such a man is undoubtedly the greatest benefactor of humanity. Great is he who gives worldly benefits to the poor and the unfortunate. But greater, far greater, is he who helps to secure heaven for sinners,' said the other. 'Then, I am one of the greatest benefactors of humanity and perhaps the most useful man alive' replied, the Brahmin laughing. 'By eating constantly in these choultries, I have given their founders a chance to distribute alms and accrue merit and thus have directly helped these sinners to secure heaven.'

II. JANAKI'S SILVER PLATE

IN a certain Hindu joint family there were five daughters-in-law. Four of these were from comparatively obscure families and so were of little account. But the fifth, Janaki, was the daughter

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of a big Government official and was therefore made much of by the mother-in-law, the sisters-in-law and the neighbours. One day, a rich lady visited the family. According to immemorial custom, the lady visitor has to be given betel and nuts to chew, and the ladies of the family have to sit with her and chew. In the case of poor people the betel leaves, quick-lime, nuts and spices are brought on a wickerware plate. The lower middle class uses brass plates and the upper middle class silver plates. The very rich use even gold plates. That day, as soon as the lady visitor took her seat in the drawing room, there was a wild search for Janaki's silver plate. The mother-in-law and all the five daughters-in-law were ransacking every blessed thing in the house, and yet the silver plate was not found. Room after room was searched, but to no purpose. The maid servant was questioned but replied that she had not seen it of late. The visitor was left to herself while this vigorous search went on. At first, she mildly remonstrated with the mother-in-law that they need not bother about the silver plate since a brass plate was quite enough for her. But the proposal was turned down with a curt 'What! bring betel on a *brass* plate to you! If you don't care for your dignity, we do,' and the

old lady pronounced the word 'brass' in such a withering tone of contempt that if the poor metal had been present it would have wept for very shame. The visitor had perforce to keep silent for some time, but, after patiently waiting for fifteen minutes and yawning at least a dozen times, she went to the mother-in-law and said, 'I know that you have got a silver plate. Why worry now? Bring the things on a brass plate and let us have a good chat.'

'But, then,' said the mother-in-law, 'suppose the plate has been stolen!' and a veritable look of horror came on her face.

'What fine flowers it had!' said the first daughter-in-law. 'And the dragons!' said the second, 'Weren't they lovely?' 'Such a polished surface I never saw,' said the third. 'It was a masterpiece,' said the fourth.

Janaki said nothing, but the visitor thought it natural, for it was not for her to expatiate on her own plate. The fear of the loss of this precious plate made the visitor wait patiently for another fifteen minutes. Then, being thoroughly bored by sitting alone, she again approached the mother-in-law and said, 'It might have been simply mislaid somewhere. I don't think anybody would have stolen it.'

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‘ I also don’t think that anybody would have stolen it,’ said the mother-in-law, ‘ we are very careful here, and the maid servant is honest.’ ‘ None would have stolen it, were it only for the fear of Janaki’s father, the big Government official,’ said Seetha, the first daughter-in-law and the person who had conducted the search most vigorously. ‘ I am sure nobody would have stolen it,’ said Janaki. ‘ Then, for Heaven’s sake, bring the things on a brass plate and let us chew and chat to our hearts’ content,’ said the visitor.

All agreed. The things were brought on a brass plate. The ladies chewed and chatted for two hours and then the visitor departed leaving her hostesses in the best of spirits and hoping that the silver plate would be found soon.

The next day, Seetha, as the representative of her family, paid a return visit to the rich lady, the mother-in-law being unable to go and having deputed her eldest daughter-in-law for this purpose. The very first question the rich lady asked Seetha was whether Janaki’s silver plate had been found.

‘ No,’ replied Seetha, ‘ nor will it ever be.’

‘ Why, was it stolen?’ asked the lady sympathetically.

‘No,’ replied Seetha. ‘Then what became of it?’ asked the lady in surprise. ‘It never existed,’ was the astounding reply. ‘Then why did you all search for it so long and describe it so minutely?’ asked the rich lady in bewilderment.

‘Because,’ said Seetha, ‘it would not look nice if a daughter of a big official had not got a silver plate. And since the father had not the generosity to give one we were forced by our mother-in-law to invent one in order to save Janaki’s prestige. The prolonged search and the minute descriptions were to make you fully believe in its existence!’

III. ALL POSSIBLE REQUIREMENTS

A VERY rich and tyrannical man wanted to celebrate his only daughter’s marriage with all conceivable pomp and splendour. He was disinclined to look into the arrangements himself partly owing to natural indolence and partly due to a belief that it was not befitting a man of his wealth and position to exert himself when everything could be got done through his servants. But he was not popular with his servants whom he often used to abuse, beat, kick and even dismiss for most frivolous reasons. None liked to serve

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under him. Only sheer starvation compelled some to enter this tyrant's service. At the head of the servants was the clerk who kept the accounts and got the work done. Despite his dignified name, the clerk too was treated no better than the servants. If anything, he was abused, beaten and kicked more often since he came into more frequent contact with the master. Seventeen clerks had been dismissed by the rich man in the short space of two years, and all for most frivolous reasons. The eighteenth clerk, Rama, was however a far cleverer man than the rest and had managed to stick on for a year. But a week before the marriage the master had asked Rama to correct an entry in the accounts, and, when it was corrected, had spat upon him on the score of the correction having been done in a shabby manner. Rama felt this keenly and resolved to put his master to shame one day. But he said nothing then since silence was essential to the success of his design, and protest would have meant instant dismissal.

The tyrant suspected nothing and three days before the marriage called Rama and said :—

‘ My daughter's marriage comes off on Monday at 7 a.m. It must, of course, be celebrated in the grandest manner possible. I shall come to

the marriage pandal¹ only at 7 a.m. on that day in time for the ceremony. You must get everything ready. All things which are at any time in the future likely to be necessary for the bride and bridegroom, must be found in the pandal when I come there. If any such thing is missing, I shall kick you like a football in the open pandal. So beware.'

'In that case, please give me a list of the articles required,' said Rama. 'I give you a list!' said the master indignantly. 'Then why do I pay you a fat salary? Get away without talking any more nonsense. Only, remember that if one thing is wanting you will be kicked like a football in the open pandal.' Rama bowed and left. There was a twinkle in his eyes as he left his master.

On Monday, at 7 a.m., the rich man entered the crowded marriage pandal thinking of how many kicks he should administer to Rama. Instead of the usual bustle on such occasions there was a strange silence though the pandal was thronged to its utmost capacity. All were whispering ominously to one another. The first things that met the rich man's eyes on entering

¹ A temporary construction with bamboos.

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the pandal were two *asantis*¹ placed right in the centre facing the seat intended for the bride and bridegroom. The rich man was furious at these most inauspicious things being there. He called Rama in an angry voice and asked 'Villain, who placed these things here? Why are they in the pandal?' 'I placed them there under your orders,' said Rama coolly to the great astonishment of the audience and the terror of the bride and bridegroom. 'Under my orders!' roared the master. 'Yes, under your orders,' replied Rama. 'You ordered me to keep ready here all things which are at any time in the future likely to be necessary for the bride and bridegroom and threatened to kick me like a football in the open pandal if one such thing were missing. These *asantis* are among the few things which are certain to be required by the bride and bridegroom one day and so I kept them ready here.' Saying this, Rama took to a precipitate flight to save himself.

IV. AN INGENIOUS REASON

IN days gone by, there was a Hindu kingdom where the prime minister usurped all the usual

¹ Stretchers used to carry the dead bodies of Hindus to the burning ground.

functions and powers of the king whose only duty was to worship God. The king, not being an angel, was dissatisfied with this arrangement, but could do nothing against the all-powerful prime minister. One day, however, he persuaded his high priest to speak to the prime minister about this injustice. The high priest, having pocketed a heavy fee for this service, approached the prime minister who received him with all honours. After the usual enquiries were over, the high priest asked the prime minister thus :—

‘Your Excellency is very learned in the *sas-tras*¹ and is the incarnation of righteousness. How can you justify your depriving the king of all powers except the right to worship God?’

‘Your Holiness,’ said the prime minister, ‘will kindly condescend to tell me whether God’s affairs or man’s affairs are more important.’

‘Undoubtedly, God’s affairs,’ replied the priest.

‘Who is more important, the king or the prime minister?’ asked the prime minister.

‘Undoubtedly, the king,’ replied the priest triumphantly. ‘Well, then, that is why I have made the arrangement Your Holiness complains

¹ Books laying down rules of moral conduct.

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of. The king, being by far the more important person, was made to solely engage himself in the all-important affairs of God, and, so that His Majesty may not be disturbed in his high function by the cares and worries of mundane affairs, I, as a dutiful and humble subject, have been looking after these.'

V. DISOBEDIENCE AND ITS CAUSE

APPU was a habitual choultry-eater who never earned anything. He and his children used to go every day to the choultry to take meals. He did not care in the least for his children. He did not send them to school or even take them with him to the choultry. He went by himself and they went by themselves. One day, he asked his eldest boy to go in the rain and fetch an old crony of his. The boy refused. The choultry-eater was enraged and gave him a blow saying, 'Won't you obey me?' The boy returned the blow and asked, 'Why should I obey you, you choultry-eating beggar? Are you the person who feeds me or clothes me that I should obey you?' Seeing that he had no chance in a physical fight with his stalwart son, Appu went to a philosopher, and, with tears in his eyes, complained of his son's disobedience.

‘What wonder if he does not obey you?’ asked the philosopher. ‘The basis of obedience of son to father and wife to husband is, quite rightly, their being maintained; of pupil to teacher is his being imparted knowledge; of free men to a leader is his service to the community, nation or humanity. You are not maintaining your son or giving him knowledge, or doing any service to the community, nation or humanity. So, why should he obey you?’

VI. WHY THE DOUBT ENDED

AMONG the Brahmins of South India it is a custom on the eleventh and twelfth days after a man's death to feast certain degraded Brahmins who are supposed to eat in the place of the ghosts of the deceased and his ancestors and may therefore be conveniently labelled ghost-eaters. These ghost-eaters form a powerful guild and pool their earnings which are afterwards divided in certain proportions. No respectable Brahmin will consent to be a ghost-eater though the income is very large. The avarice of the ghost-eaters is unbounded, and finds a fertile field for its operations in the superstitions of the people. It is a common belief that a ghost-eater must eat sumptuously and say, ‘I am satisfied. Be thou

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free from anxiety' and go away taking with him a plank, a stick, a pair of sandals and an umbrella and some foodstuffs. Otherwise, the ghost of the departed will not leave the house and will continue to wander about its old haunts to the infinite discomfort and danger of the survivors. The ghost-eaters fix their fee with reference to the fleeceable capacity of their victim. This they go on increasing shamelessly as the meal is being eaten till the final figure is reached at the psychological moment of saying 'We are satisfied. Be thou free from anxiety.'

Gangadhara was a big landlord of an interior village, but heavily in debts. His mother had just died. He spoke with the ghost-eaters and agreed to pay what was for him a heavy fee of fifty rupees. Two ghost-eaters came on the twelfth day and were served with a sumptuous meal of several costly dishes. One represented the ghost of the mother, and the other the ghost of the ancestors. Ghee and curds were standing in huge vessels. Such is the quantity of ghee served to these ghost-eaters that one of them with a record of thirty years' service behind him used to declare that when he died no firewood would be necessary to burn his corpse, but that it would be quite enough to apply a lighted match-

stick to his corpse which would burn of itself owing to the ghee in it! But to return to our story. The ghost-eaters raised the fee to a hundred rupees before they would consent to touch the meals. Gangadhar was prepared for this piece of devilry and agreed, albeit most reluctantly. The ghost-eaters ate a few morsels and then demanded that the fee should be raised to one hundred and fifty rupees if they were to swallow the usual oceanic quantities of ghee. Gangadhar was perturbed and indignant. He protested his inability to pay, wept, caught hold of the feet of the ghost-eaters and asked them to be content with Rs. 100, but to no purpose. As the ghost had to leave the house and as only the ghost-eaters could make it do so, he agreed to pay. When the time came for eating the sweet-meats, the ghost-eaters demanded fifty rupees more. Gangadhar again protested, wept and pleaded his poverty, but all to no avail. 'Agree to pay two hundred or we shall rise up at once with the remaining meal uneaten,' said the ghost-eaters. And, of course, it was essential that they should eat a full meal. Else, the ghost would never leave the house. Poor Gangadhar was perplexed. He knew that the ghost of his mother who was so economical that she even

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gathered cow dung and made cow-dung cakes for the hearth in order to save the cost of firewood would never demand the waste of so much money. Moreover, he saw no real danger to the family if the kindly old lady's ghost were to hover round the house. That would be an effective protection against thieves. But Gangadhar loved his mother, he wanted her ghost to have peace and not to be wandering about. After fifteen minutes' heart-searching and deep thought, he weepingly agreed to pay the extortionate sum demanded. The ghost-eaters smiled to themselves and swallowed the sweetmeats. When the stage of curds came, they demanded a hundred rupees more. Gangadhar went out for five minutes and came back and readily agreed. The look of gloom had disappeared from his face and he seemed to be happy. The ghost-eaters were surprised, but did not think much about it. After the meal was over, they demanded a hundred rupees more for uttering the all-important words. Without a moment's hesitation, Gangadhar agreed. The ghost-eaters were still more surprised and became suspicious. 'Bring the money and then we shall utter the words,' said they. Gangadhar brought the money in an instant and counted it and gave it to the ghost-

eaters. 'Give us Rs. 100 more and make it Rs. 500,' said the ghost-eaters. Gangadhar gave a hundred rupees more without a word of protest. The ghost-eaters were immensely satisfied. Pocketing the five hundred rupees, they said, 'WE ARE FULLY SATISFIED. BE YOU ENTIRELY FREE FROM ANXIETY!' Then taking the planks, sandals, sticks, umbrellas and food-stuffs, the two ghost-eaters went in the southern¹ direction as usage requires. The whole street was deserted, and children were all safely hidden in their houses, for woe would befall the child who saw a ghost-eater. As soon as the ghost-eaters started on their return journey, a villager had proclaimed in a stentorian voice, 'The ghost-eaters are coming! The ghost-eaters are coming!' and a general hiding had ensued. 'What fools!' said the ghost-eater representing the mother's ghost to his companion as he surveyed the deserted street, 'they are prepared to pay us five hundred rupees for consenting to take a good meal, and yet none will take meals with us or even willingly see us. But what do we care! I shall get $\frac{1}{32}$ of the fifty rupees and one-fourth of the remaining Rs. 450

¹ Because the Lord of the Dead lives in the South.

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as they are the result of our own exertions and by the rules we get one half. Will not my concubine Nani be glad at the sight of this Rs. 114-1-0? She will no longer think of preferring others to me. But why did that Gangadhar suddenly lose all hesitation towards the end? Perhaps, he bowed to the inevitable. Poor fellow! He had to pay Rs. 500 for satisfying a single superstition and he had to borrow this amount as he has no ready cash and his estate is heavily encumbered. But what do we care provided we get our income?' The other nodded a vigorous assent. The ghost-eaters had by now left the village behind and were in a lonely moor. Suddenly, four Muhammadans swooped down on them, robbed them of their five hundred rupees and gave them a sound beating.

'Robbers! Robbers!' shouted the poor ghost-eaters. 'We are not robbers but the agents of Gangadhar whom you robbed so shamelessly,' declared the leader of the gang.

'So Gangadhar sent you!' asked the ghost-eaters quite taken aback. 'Of course, he did,' said the leader. 'Till he agreed to pay Rs. 200 he was prepared to deal with you honestly; hence his hesitation and doubt. Afterwards, when you demanded Rs. 300 he was disgusted with your

insatiable avarice and engaged us at Rs. 2-8-0 apiece, and that leaves him Rs. 490 net gain.' 'But his mother's ghost will never leave the house,' said the ghost-eater who represented her ghost. 'It left when you uttered the significant words and left. Why, you are the ghost, aren't you?' asked the Muhammadan leader laughingly. 'If you dare to step again into Gangadhar's house, your legs will be broken to pieces.' 'We shall never enter the house again,' said the ghost-eaters, 'Now, leave us,' and they threw down everything they had. 'Take the planks, sticks, sandals, umbrellas and foodstuffs, or else we shall bury you alive here,' said the leader, and the ghost-eaters obeyed. 'Mind you,' said the leader, 'if you talk about this to any one, you will have to arrange for your own ghost-eating.' 'We shall never reveal anything' said the ghost-eaters who had by now fully realized why Gangadhar's doubt had ended.

VII. A NOVEL MONEY ORDER

KRISHNAYYA SASTRI was a very estimable orthodox Hindu and a Sanskrit pandit in a big college. Being possessed of something more than a nodding acquaintance with English.

¹ That is, be prepared to die.

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he was keenly interested in defending ancient practices with arguments derived from modern life. Analogy was his favourite weapon of defence. One day, a sceptical Hindu asked the pandit how he could ever believe that the ghee which was thrown into the fire and was immediately burnt up could reach the Gods and ghosts for whom it was meant. The pandit could not give a reply then and there, but promised the smiling young man that he would successfully meet this new onslaught on the sacred practice within three days. That evening when he returned home he was not in his usual mood. He was unusually worried. He took little food in the night and threw a pot of ghee into the fire to the unspeakable indignation of his better half who would have beaten him then and there were it not for keeping up the social decorum before the children some of whom were grown-up. When the pandit retired to rest, he had no sleep. He was racking his brains. His partner for life was delivering a long curtain lecture on his utter wastefulness as evidenced by his throwing the ghee into the fire wantonly. 'It would have sufficed for feeding the children for fifteen days. But, then, what do you care for the children? If you did, would you have thrown their ghee into

the fire?' and so on and so forth. Great was the pandit's absorption in thought, but greater was his wife's eloquence. At one in the morning the lecture had not yet concluded. 'We shall have to send a money order for Rs. 25 for my saree next month. How are we to save this sum if you go on wasting money like this?' Krishnayya Sastri suddenly got up from bed and to the utter surprise of his wife rushed out of the house like a mad man. His wife quite believed that he was mad; what else could he be when he threw a pot of ghee wantonly into the fire? She feared, poor lady, that he had rushed out in order to commit suicide leaving her a poor widow with seven little children to look after. She hastily locked the door and weeping set out with her grown-up children in search of her lord and master.

Meanwhile, Krishnayya Sastri ran to the sceptic's house, and, finding it locked, thundered at the door till the sceptic woke up and came to the door fearing that dacoits were attacking the house. He asked in a trembling voice 'Who is there?' 'I, Krishnayya Sastri, open the door, quick,' cried the Sastri from outside. The sceptic opened the door and asked, 'Why, what is the matter'

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‘How does the money which you send by money order at one post office reach the payee your name? This money is kept back here and fresh money is paid out at the other end in satisfaction of the money paid here. Especially will this be clear to you when you consider the case of telegraphic money orders. In the same way, Agni, the God of Fire, to whom we offer the ghee here to be conveyed to the Gods and ghosts we name, keeps the ghee and delivers fresh ghee of the same quality and quantity at the other end to the Gods and ghosts.’ Saying this and leaving the sceptic gaping with astonishment, the Sastri went back home triumphantly, meeting on the way his weeping wife and older children.

‘We thought you had gone to commit suicide,’ said the wife, ‘What!’ said the pandit, ‘I commit a heinous sin like suicide! What nonsense! I went out in order to crush that humbug of a doubting sceptic whom I pulverized just now. And you, my dearest, supplied me with the weapon for crushing him. Your mention of the money order, that was a God-send’ and he gave a big kiss to his wife forgetting the presence of his grown-up children.¹

¹ Orthodox Hindus will never kiss their wives in the presence of others.

VIII. BIT BY BIT

A BIG movement was started in Malabar for doing away with untouchability, unapproachability and unseeability. The members of certain castes cannot be touched by the high caste people, others cannot be approached near, and yet others cannot be even seen. These triple evils were sought to be uprooted by an energetic society. Immediately, there sprang up a controversy between the reformers and the reactionaries. This controversy was not confined to the active participants in the struggle but extended itself into all the nooks and corners of the district and even outside. Even passionless philosophers were arguing the question out in their own heatless way.

Anand and Mukund were two such philosophers.

'Look here,' said Anand to Mukund one delightful evening 'Don't you think that this movement for wiping out untouchability, unapproachability and unseeability has not come a moment too soon?'

'This movement is premature and mischievous,' replied Mukund. 'Social reform must come bit by bit and not all at once like this if it is to be beneficial and permanent, especially so since

these out-castes have been treated like this for centuries.'

'In my opinion, this wrong of centuries must be set right at once and not bit by bit as you seem to think,' said Anand.

'I am emphatically of opinion that it should be set right bit by bit, drop by drop, grain by grain. I feel the wrong no less keenly than you do, but my idea of remedying it is different. I never believe in any other method but the bit by bit, drop by drop, grain by grain one,' said Mukund. 'It will be a terribly slow method,' remarked Anand. 'I am for this terrible slowness,' said Mukund. 'When it concerns others,' said Anand. 'No, also when it concerns myself. It is a philosophical conviction,' replied Mukund.

'I shall prove the contrary,' said Anand. 'Do,' said Mukund.

There the discussion ended for the time being.

Some days later, Mukund was invited by Anand to breakfast with him on Dwadasi¹ day. Both Mukund and Anand had fasted the whole of the previous day according to time-honoured

¹ The twelfth day of the fortnight. The eleventh is a day of fasting.

usage, and Mukund naturally expected a sumptuous breakfast. So he bathed and said his prayers early in the morning and went to Anand's house with a giant's appetite.

Anand took Mukund into the spacious dining hall, and they sat down before two plantain leaves.¹ Dishes of various kinds were ready, and whetted the appetite of Mukund by their delicious smell. Mukund's tongue began to water at the prospect of such a splendid meal and he prepared himself for a mighty attack on the rice, dhal, curries and delicacies as soon as they would be served. What was his surprise when Anand's wife, the hostess, put just one grain of boiled rice and one drop of each curry on each of the plantain leaves! Mukund was speechless with indignation, and, having altogether forgotten the previous controversy between him and Anand, asked Anand angrily why he was being insulted like this. Anand replied laughingly that it was no insult at all and that the next grain of rice and the next drop of the curries would be served in half an hour. 'Who the devil will wait till then? Certainly not I. I never thought that I would be insulted like this,'

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said Mukund, still unaware of Anand's meaning. 'Why, I thought you believed in no other method but the bit by bit, drop by drop, grain by grain one,' said Anand laughing loudly. 'Especially so since you have fasted the whole of yesterday.'

Mukund saw that he had fallen into a trap and blushed. 'Well,' said Anand in a jolly tone, 'since I am a believer in rapid measures and since you yourself have repudiated the method you advocated, let us sit down and have a hearty meal.'

Anand's wife, who had had a hearty laugh at Mukund's expense, now came again and served the meals in the usual fashion.

IX. STONE AND MUD

ONE day, a stone got exceedingly proud of itself and felt an overpowering desire to tell some neighbouring mud how superior to it it was.

Said the stone to the mud, 'I am hard, clean, beautiful, durable and strong whereas you are flabby, dirty, flimsy, ugly and weak.'

'I grow corn and vegetables on which all living things depend ultimately. What do you grow? Your strength is barren, my weakness is fertile,' retorted the mud.

X. PESSIMIST AND OPTIMIST

'THIS world is a vale of tears, an abode of sorrow, an ocean of misery,' said the pessimist to the optimist. 'Hence, the wise man will not care to live here below, and death will always be a welcome relief to him.'

'What is the use of that?' asked the optimist, 'you are for death, I for life, and to the man who lives I am the more useful teacher. I hold that life is worth living, and you hold that death is worth seeking. If you put the issue clearly like this, the vast majority of living men will be with me.'

'I am not so sure of that,' said the pessimist, 'many millions of men do think that life is not worth living and that death is worth seeking. I for one sincerely and whole-heartedly believe in this.'

'Then why did you not seek death long ere this and rid the world of your pernicious philosophy? I hope you will do so at least now,' said the optimist grimly. The pessimist bit his lips and remained silent.

XI. MY ALL TO THE POOR

A BIG merchant in a famous seaport in a small Hindu kingdom in ancient days was on his death-bed. Several poor people had assembled in the

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compound of his house in the expectation of receiving small presents. The big merchant caused them all to be summoned to his bedside and said in a voice broken by tears and sobs, 'Friends, I have been a great sinner all my life. I have forgotten God and the poor. It is my firm conviction that only God and the poor can help any man not only in the other world but also in this. Hence, after mature deliberation I have resolved to give my all to the poor.' The atmosphere resounded with the shouts of joy of the assembled poor and the bitter heart-rending cries of his four sons who had been disinherited by his declaration. The merchant called his sons and asked them to cease weeping, 'Do not weep so bitterly. It is all for the best. A gift to the poor will never make your position worse in any respect. I began with nothing but have lived all my life in luxury. So you also will do well to begin with a clean slate. Nothing is so damaging to enterprise like a paternal legacy,' said he. The sons appeared to be somewhat consoled. Meanwhile the news of the legacy had spread like wild fire in the town, and three thousand poor assembled and marched to the palace. They wanted the king to recognize them as the heirs of the merchant. 'He

has given us his all and we want his all,' declared they. The sons protested, but their protests were overruled as the merchant had no ancestral property, and so all his property, being self-acquired, could be disposed of in any way he liked. Finally, the king passed a decree transferring all the assets and liabilities of the merchant to the three thousand poor in equal shares. There was wild rejoicing among these poverty-stricken creatures, and they blessed the merchant and prayed for his instant death and perpetual salvation. Three hours after the decree was passed, the merchant died. When the king's officers looked up his accounts, it was found that he had left assets of Rs. 30,000 and debts amounting to Rs. 1,50,000. The creditors clamoured for full payment. The three thousand poor, the legatees, began to melt away on hearing that the merchant's all meant net liabilities amounting to Rs. 1,20,000, but the king detained them all and forced them to take the legacy. Each poor man was forced to pay up forty rupees to the creditors, or, if he had no money, to work for the creditors free till this debt of forty rupees was discharged. Too late, the unfortunate creatures realized the meaning of the words 'It is all for the best.'

XII. WHO IS GREATER

THE heads of two great Hindu monasteries were always quarrelling with one another as to which of them was greater. There was no end to the petty quarrels between these two. Instead of promoting the spiritual welfare of their followers or the cause of religion, these two were frittering away their time and that of their followers in meaningless squabbles regarding precedence, first honours, and such other silly trifles.

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One day, the two resolved to go to a well-known and revered saint of the neighbourhood and know his opinion as to which of them was greater. 'Oh, brother,' said they to him, 'great is your reputation for wisdom and saintliness. Tell us definitely as to which of us two is spiritually greater, and settle this age-long dispute.' The saint smiled and said, 'Whoever among you admits that the other is greater is spiritually greater, for the essence of spirituality is true humility.' Both at once declared in one voice that the other was greater and then asked the saint to decide. 'The question has been decided by your own admissions' said the saint. 'But, if you want my opinion, both of you appear to be equally great scoundrels.'

XIII. A VERY CLEVER BOY

THERE were in a certain village two boys studying in the third form. Both of them were twelve years old. One day, the village was surprised to learn that one of the boys had managed to get a job as assistant to a salesman at a salary of five rupees per month and had consequently left off his studies. 'What a clever boy!' exclaimed the whole village, and the mother of the other boy told her son how he was miles behind his comrade in cleverness. 'There is your friend earning money already at such a tender age. And here you are, as great a drain on our resources as ever,' said she. Her son simply said, 'Wait and see, mother.' Twenty years passed on. The very clever boy was at the end of this period a salesman drawing a pay of ten rupees per month while his comrade had passed his M.A. examination and was drawing a handsome monthly salary of two hundred and fifty rupees. Once the M.A. passed by the shop where the other was employed. The salesman hurriedly retired inside the shop and with tears in his eyes exclaimed to himself, 'People called me then a very clever boy. I feel now that I was a very stupid boy. I entered the race of life all too soon, before I

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was equipped for it, and have been paying the penalty ever since.'

XIV. THE UNANSWERABLE DEFENCE

A DOCTOR was charged before a Magistrate with having negligently given poison to a patient in a prescription and of thus having caused his death. The evidence against him was overwhelming. The prescription showed only too clearly that a powerful poison had been entered therein by mistake. Everybody was anxious for the doctor's fate, for it looked certain that he would be convicted. But the doctor looked cheerful and unperturbed. To his friends who talked to him about the seriousness of the situation his only reply was 'Never be anxious. I have got an unanswerable defence.' When the whole prosecution evidence was over, the doctor gave his statement, 'My negligence, if any,' said he, 'is cured by my compounder's care. He never gives any medicine without diluting it hundred-fold in water, and few poisons can stand such a dilution and certainly not this poison.' The prosecution found this argument so strong that it at once withdrew the case with the permission of the magistrate, and the doctor was discharged.

XV. THE KING AND HIS CRITIC

LONG long ago, there was a king who was reputed to be one of the best kings that ever country had. There lived in his dominions a critic who was always criticizing the king's actions and even intentions. The king did not at all like the critic and secretly resolved to wreak his vengeance one day. After thirty years of beneficent rule the king felt himself powerful enough to punish the critic. He ordered that poor man to be hanged. On the day of the hanging there was a big crowd near the gallows. The king went near the condemned man and was asked by him what he had done to merit death. 'What good did you ever do to your king or country?' asked the king, 'and what good will it do to either of them if you were saved from the gallows?' 'Sire,' replied the critic, 'my constant criticism made you ever fearful of treading on the evil path which leads to woe, and saved the country from misrule. It made you one of the best kings who lived and ruled this land. This much I did for my king and country. If I were saved from the gallows, my king would retain his name unsullied, and my country will not lose the faculty of fearless criticism. If you can lay your hands on your breast and declare that what I say

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just now is false, you are welcome to hang me. Otherwise, your majesty will be pleased to release me.' 'Release him,' said the king turning away from the critic and shedding a tear of repentance, 'release him, for he is speaking the truth.'

XVI. SAMUDRAGUPTA AND THE *VEENA* ¹.

'WHAT is your majesty's best claim to greatness?' asked one of his courtiers of the great Gupta Emperor Samudragupta. 'My proficiency at the *veena*,' replied the emperor. 'The next best claim?' queried the courtier who was puzzled that the great conqueror had not named his military prowess as the best claim. 'My capacity to write verses,' replied Samudragupta. 'The next?' asked the courtier. 'My piety,' replied the emperor. 'The next?' asked the courtier. 'Love of my mother,' replied Samudragupta. 'What about your majesty's prowess in war?' asked the astounded courtier. 'That is nothing to boast about,' replied the emperor. 'It is only to be expected from me as a king and a Kshatriya.'² It is also no permanent title to greatness since the fortunes of war are proverbially uncertain.

¹ An Indian musical instrument.

² A warrior.

Above all, there is human blood in it, and nothing stained with other people's blood can ever be a real title to greatness.'

XVII. NO THINKING FOR FIVE MINUTES

A RICH MAN, who was a psychologist, once offered a reward of five hundred rupees to any man who could, while remaining fully awake, suppress all thought for five minutes. None came forward for a long time. At last, a man came and stood for five minutes with a face showing not the least trace of thought. At the end of the five minutes he claimed the prize. 'Were you absolutely without thought?' asked the psychologist. 'Yes, absolutely,' replied the man. 'Were you not thinking all the time about this prize and the necessity of suppressing all thought?' asked the psychologist. 'Yes, I was,' replied the man ruefully and went his way.

XVIII. HARSHA'S REPLY

THE Emperor Harsha was a worshipper of Siva, the Sun and Buddha. Among his courtiers at one time were Bana, the Brahmin who worshipped Siva fervently, Kumarapala the prince of Assam who was an ardent worshipper of the sun, and Hiuen Tsang the Chinese pilgrim who was a

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whole-hearted Buddhist. Every one of the three wanted to win Harsha over wholeheartedly to his sect. All three asked him one day why he was following all the three religions, and ended by exhorting him to abandon the two other faiths. Bana requested him to become a whole-hearted devotee of Siva, Kumarapala adjured him to worship the Sun God alone, and Hiuen Tsang begged of him to think of none but Buddha. Harsha said 'There are three reasons which impel me to remain as I am. There is some good in every great cult, and any really religious man ought to be able to appreciate every great religion. In fact, the characteristic of Buddha is *buddhi* or wisdom, of Siva is *sivam* or bliss, and of the sun is *prabha* or light. Where there is wisdom, there are bliss and light also, and *vice versa*. Knowing this, no wise man will ever find fault with one for following all the three religions. He can only extol one who wants to explore three tracks to the same place instead of being content with the beaten track followed by his ancestors. Secondly, I want to show tolerance and enlightenment and by my example to teach these sterling qualities to my subjects also. What will teach them tolerance better than seeing their king following three apparently conflicting religions

and by each of the three sects being forced not to attack the other two immoderately out of deference to the king? Thirdly, none but a worshipper can raise a cult to its highest level, purge it of its evils, and prevent it from sinking low. If he is not a worshipper, his advice has little weight and is sure to be disregarded. As for your request asking me to drop two of my cults, you yourselves will never agree as to which of the two cults to drop. Bana will vote for dropping the sun and Buddha, Kumarapala for dropping Buddha and Siva, and Hiuen Tsang for dropping the sun and Siva. Rather than see me abandon your particular cult wholly, all of you three would prefer this part-worship.'

All agreed and stood silent with confusion.

XIX. SHALLOW CONDEMNATION

GOVIND was a first form teacher in a small country school having classes up to the third form. He was a ploughed matriculate, but yet had a great pride in his own knowledge which he modestly believed to be as great as any other man's. One day, he told his pupils about Galileo and his cruel persecution. 'This man, who merely stated the truth that the earth was moving round the sun which was constant, was persecuted by idiotic

ruffians among whose intellectual equipments that most precious of all possessions, receptivity to new ideas, was not one,' thundered Govind. One boy rose and asked, 'Sir, is not the sun also moving? Was not Galileo wrong when he said that it was constant?' 'No,' replied Govind fiercely, 'Galileo could never have been wrong. The sun never moves. Who gave you this silly idea? Let us hear no more of it.' 'The sun moves, that is quite certain,' said the boy, 'for my uncle who is an M.A. in science told me so and he could never be wrong.' The teacher was furious at this gross act of disobedience. He felt that an M.A. was purposely being flung at him since he was but a poor ploughed matriculate. Well he knew that these modern M.A.s, like the uncle of the boy, were not equal even to the plucked matriculates of his days. He saw the other boys laugh and felt that it was high time to assert his authority. He therefore asked the offending boy to stand up on the bench as a punishment. 'Will you now give up this silly idea of the sun's moving?' asked he. 'No,' said the boy, 'because the sun does move.' The teacher caned the boy, but to no purpose. At last, he asked the boy to get out of the class and then went to the headmaster and asked him to dismiss the boy from the school. The head-

master was a B.A. He was indignant that a first form boy should entertain such heretical notions like the sun's moving, and that he should persist in them despite his teacher's orders. He agreed with Govind that it was a case for dismissal. The ploughed matriculate was delighted. 'Sir,' said he in an outburst of confidence, 'fancy that fool of an M.A., the boy's uncle, holding such a silly idea, for he instilled it into the boy.' 'Did he?' said the headmaster, who had a profound respect for degrees, 'I must ask him about it.' That evening, the headmaster met the boy's uncle and asked him 'Does the sun really move?' 'Of course, it does,' said the M.A. 'So do all the stars including the *constant* pole star,' and showed the headmaster the relevant passages in a modern book on astronomy. The headmaster had great reverence for printed matter and was thoroughly convinced. 'What a fool is this Govind who turned out your nephew!' said he as he parted. 'But what else can we expect from a plucked matriculate?'

The next day, the headmaster went to the first form as soon as the class had assembled, and calling Govind said to him in the presence of the boys, 'Your foolish belief that the sun does not move is too silly for words. The boy was right

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and you wrong. He is re-admitted into the class and awarded a prize of a book for his up-to-date knowledge and moral courage; unless you improve and get rid of your silly notions and show some receptivity to new ideas, I shall be forced to recommend your dismissal from service.'

Poor Govind suffered from intense shame and pain, but was too poor to defy the headmaster and risk the loss of his job. He bowed his head low and proceeded with his lessons. That night, he confidentially told his wife about the incident pledging her to secrecy. She told her intimate friends under like pledges of secrecy, and they also did likewise. Soon the whole countryside was laughing at this story.

XX. WHY WORSHIP ANIMALS?

'WHY do you worship bulls, monkeys and kites?' asked a Roman Catholic missionary of a Hindu. 'To take away man's consuming arrogance that God is only like him in form and shape, to worship God in whatever form, and to recognize the God immanent in them as in other beings,' replied the Hindu. 'There is absolutely no proof that God is like man in form and shape. The difference between God and man is far greater than that between God and bulls or monkeys or kites.'

When you can reconcile yourself to worshipping God in the form of an image modelled on the shape of a human being, where is the absurdity in worshipping bulls, monkeys and kites ?'

XXI. QUOTING GREAT MEN'S VICES

THERE lived once a man who had married two wives, had deserted one of them, and was given to excessive drinking, gambling, vanity, immorality and cruelty. A holy man once rebuked him for his many vile qualities. 'Are you not ashamed of your vices?' asked the holy man. 'Why should I?' asked the other. 'Did not Krishna¹ marry 16,008 wives, did not Buddha desert his wife, did not the ancient *rishis*² drink liquor when they offered sacrifices, did not Nala³ gamble, was not Arjun vain, was not Indra⁴ immoral, was not Parasurama⁵ cruel?'

'Yes' replied the holy man. 'Then why do you find fault with me?' asked the other indignantly. 'Because you never gave a *Bhagavad*

¹ The divine author of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

² Sages.

³ A famous king of old.

⁴ The lord of the Devas or demi-gods and the giver of rain.

⁵ An incarnation of Vishnu. He decimated the warrior caste twenty-one times and created the west coast by reclaiming it from the sea.

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Gita to the world like Krishna, or devoted all your life-time to the service of your fellow-men like Buddha or gave wise books to the world like the *rishis* and because you cannot rule a country justly like Nala or fight a righteous war like Arjuna or give rain to the world like Indra or create a new land from the sea like Parasurama. You are, in fact, the thorn without the rose and are thus thoroughly contemptible.'

XXII. THE RAT'S RETORT

A FARMER, when harvesting his paddy, saw a field rat among the corn. He went to kill it saying 'Wretch, for stealing the corn I raised so laboriously and honestly you deserve death.' 'Stay awhile and hear me,' said the rat. 'What about man who robs the poor bees of their hard-earned and honestly-acquired honey? Does he too deserve death? Man often kills the bees for stealing their honey. I do not kill men though I steal their grain. Again, man knows the distinction between stolen articles and honestly-earned things. We rats don't. Then why kill me when you don't kill all men who steal honey?' The farmer was dumbfounded for a moment, and, then, killed the rat with a stunning blow saying, 'Quite right, oh rat, let me first kill you

for having stolen my corn, and then, let the bees, if they like and if they can, kill me and others who have stolen their honey.'

XXIII. EQUAL IN EVERYTHING

'ALL men are equal in all respects,' roared a communist from a city platform at a crowded meeting after a virulent attack on aristocrats and the middle classes. 'Equal?' queried a bourgeois. 'Ay, equal in honesty, in virtue, in intelligence, in everything,' returned the communist. 'If so, why need you preach to others since they already know all that you want to say? And why blame the aristocrats and the bourgeoisie who are equally honest, equally virtuous and equally intelligent?' retorted the bourgeois.

XXIV. FATE'S DECREES

'FATE decrees everything; none can resist Fate,' declared a fatalist one day to his friend who was no believer in Fate. The friend, with a view to teach him a lesson, gave a blow to the fatalist who returned it with three-fold ferocity. 'Why beat me for what Fate did?' asked the friend. 'Why ask me for what Fate did?' returned the

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fatalist. 'Fate decreed that you should beat me first, that I should return the blow with three-fold ferocity, and that we should talk as we do now. Fate decrees everything. None can resist Fate.'

XXV. EAST IS EAST

'EAST is east, west is west, you can never make them meet,' said a platform orator. 'They have already met,' said a schoolmaster from among the audience. 'The eastest east is the westest west, the world being round. The proposition which you state originated in days when people believed the world to be flat and there were no trains, steamships, airships and telegraphy. With the discovery that the world was round and with the advent of trains, steamships, airships, and wireless, it has become hopelessly antiquated.'

XXVI. NO FOREIGN THING WANTED

'WE don't want any foreign thing here' said a patriot to his friend who was a geologist.

'If you go back far enough, everything is foreign except the inner core of mother earth,' replied the geologist. 'The surface of the earth is foreign; so are the trees, the animals and even man including yourself. Change is in nature,

and native and foreign change their meanings constantly.'

XXVII. NO CHANGE HEREAFTER

'No change shall hereafter occur in my dominions. Things shall be as they are now,' said a despot to his prime minister. 'That cannot be, sire,' replied the prime minister. 'Otherwise, babies will remain babies, old men old, sick men sick, soldiers quartered in barracks, crops immature, taxes unpaid'—'Stop!' said the king, 'I forgot this last point. What is the cause of all this change, oh prime minister?'

'Time changes, sire, and with time must change all things which depend on time,' replied the minister.

XXVIII. LOVE OF GOLD

'LOVE of gold is inherent in man,' said a cynic, 'from his very birth man loves gold.'

'No,' said a philosopher, 'it is an acquired idea.'

'Prove it,' said the cynic. 'Alright,' said the philosopher. The cynic chose a child of one year, and both the philosopher and the cynic attracted the child, the one with the ripe red strawberry and the other with the glittering

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almighty gold. The child saw the sovereign and the strawberry, and, without a moment's hesitation, went to the philosopher and took the strawberry from his outstretched hand. 'You see this,' said the philosopher triumphantly, 'it is the training which perverts the child, not its instinct. Hence it is that savages in olden days used to give gold dust even for cheap glass beads.'

XXIX. THE WAY TO HEAVEN

'THE way to Heaven is difficult to follow,' said a religious preacher at Calicut beach, 'but there is a way to it for all who will but see it.' 'Where is the way across the space?' asked a cynic looking up sarcastically at the skies, 'I see no way.' All laughed. The preacher asked the cynic to look at the sea and point out to him the sea-routes to the Laccadives, the Maladives, Bombay, Colombo, Aden and other distant places. 'I can't point them out,' said the cynic, 'but the mariners can.'

'Exactly so,' said the preacher, 'even here, you don't see any way, but you know that there are ways and that mariners know them. What wonder, then, if there are routes to Heaven which you do not see but which the initiated see easily?'

XXX. THE ONLY THING WANTED

IN a certain lower secondary school in Malabar the children felt great inconvenience at examinations owing to the absence of pads on which to place the sheets of thin paper supplied to them for writing the answers. Few of them were rich enough to buy regular pads. The headmaster and his five assistants pondered over the problem. One of the teachers had a brilliant idea. He suggested that they should write to some prominent commercial firms of Madras for catalogues under pretence of wanting to buy some of their things and then use these catalogues as pads. 'These big firms,' he said, 'are sending catalogues post free. We have only to spend half an anna per catalogue for the postcard requesting them to send it. These firms fleece so many people that they deserve no pity at our hands. It is only a case of taxing the rich for the benefit of the poor.' The headmaster and the other teachers approved of the wisdom of the idea, and praised the public spirit of the teacher. The teacher was immensely gratified and suggested another brilliant thing. This was that the headmaster and all the teachers should write for the catalogues so that the companies might more readily send them. All agreed. The

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enterprising originator of this idea soon found out from a directory the names of twenty-five prominent firms in Madras. There were three hundred boys in all. The six teachers could get one hundred and fifty catalogues at a time. So the first batch of one hundred and fifty students was ordered to bring a half-anna post-card each. Twenty-five boys were allotted to each teacher, and a company was chosen by each boy. Then twenty-five cards to the twenty-five selected companies were written signed and despatched by every one of the six teachers. The uniform wording of the letters was as follows:—

SIRS,

As I want to buy some of your things urgently, please send me your latest catalogue by return of post.

Yours faithfully,

(Sd.) X, ESQ.,

Headmaster (or Teacher),

*Board Lower Secondary School, Modanur,
Modanur Post, S. Malabar.*

The Madras companies were delighted at these unexpected enquiries from a remote country part, and, overjoyed at finding a new market, sent the catalogues post haste. The resourceful teacher

THE ONLY THING WANTED

had deputed a battalion of students to watch the opening of the mail bags since the local branch postmaster had the reputation of appropriating all catalogues not claimed at that moment. For the next few days, the poor runner of Modanur post office groaned under the unusually huge burden of the mail bags. Every mail brought twenty-five or fifty catalogues. In seven days, the whole hundred and fifty catalogues were received and duly distributed among the students. Not one catalogue could be appropriated by the postmaster, such was the vigilance of the boys. Great was the joy of the students at the beautiful catalogues. Some were larger and more handsome than others, and this created some chagrin, but nothing to speak about. Several people of the locality, seeing such beautiful catalogues coming post free, were tempted, and wrote for them. Merchants wanted to use them for wrapping sugar and other articles, accountants wanted to use them as pads, and children loved them for their pictures. Soon, hundreds of postcards flew to each of the twenty-five companies, the stereotyped form mentioned above being used by one and all. The companies got alarmed. Their stocks of catalogues were being exhausted though the year was hardly two months old, and not

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even a pin had been ordered for by the hundreds of people of Modanur to whom catalogues had been sent at heavy cost in postage. They lost their patience, and sincerely regretted their folly. Especially was this the case with Peacock, Cuckoo and Brothers whose catalogue, being the largest and the finest, had the greatest demand from Modanur. It was at this unfavourable moment that the resourceful teacher asked fifty selected students to write to Peacock, Cuckoo and Brothers for catalogues in the usual phraseology. This was the limit. Four days later, the expectant students at the post office found, instead of the fifty catalogues, a postcard addressed to the Headmaster, teachers and students of the Board Lower Secondary School, Modanur, and the residents of Modanur. It read as follows :—

MADRAS,
April 11, 1926.

DEAR SIRs,

The only things you want from us urgently seem to be our catalogues, and you have not the decency even to pay for their postage. Your further letters for catalogues have been consigned to the waste-paper basket. If you repeat such

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tactics in future; we shall be forced to take criminal proceedings against you collectively and severally for cheating.

Yours faithfully,
CROWCRANE,

For Peacock Cuckoo and Bros.

And more or less similar cards came from other companies when they were requested to send more catalogues. The headmaster and the other teachers were in a chastened mood. But the resourceful teacher was jubilant.

'Let them crow as they like,' said he. 'The fact remains that we have succeeded in bagging one hundred and fifty catalogues, and that is no mean achievement.' All the others agreed.

XXXI. UNIFORMITY WITH A VENGEANCE

A CERTAIN powerful despot wanted to enforce a dead uniformity in his wide dominions. He compelled everybody to wear the same dress, profess the same religion, have the same customs, take to the same games, eat the same grain and talk the same language. The court jester knew full well how all people would soon come to hate his master for his oppressive and absurd decrees. He did not want the king to become unpopular with his subjects. He knew that none except

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himself would dare to tell the despot to his face that the decrees were tyrannical and absurd. So he went and boldly protested to his master, but in vain. His arguments that the five fingers were not of equal length and that if they were they would not be so beautiful, that mountains would lose all charm if all were of equal height and length, so also rivers if all were of equal breadth and depth, and animals if all were of the same variety and of the same dimensions and colour, had no effect on the king. So, one day, the jester caused the tusks of all the palace elephants to be cut to a uniform size. The king, who took a pride in his tuskers, was greatly enraged at this mutilation. He sent for the jester and asked him 'Why did you do this, you villain?'

'Why did you do this, you villain?' repeated the jester.

'Villain,' said the king, beside himself with rage, 'are you here to repeat parrot-like what I say?'

'I thought, sire, that you preferred uniformity to life,' replied the jester bursting into laughter. 'So it is that I cut the tusks to a uniform length and repeated your words parrot-like.' The king blushed with shame and revoked his absurd decrees.

XXXII. THE KING'S REVIEW

It was a custom in an ancient Hindu kingdom that a king should on his coronation day review the army in order to find out whether it was keeping up its ancient courage and efficiency. Kirtivarman held the usual review on his coronation in the way laid down by custom and precedent. He picked out a soldier at random and asked him to get up a tree forty feet high and jump down. Without the slightest hesitation, the soldier did as he was ordered, and met with an instant death. The king gave a handsome pension to the deceased man's wife and relations for life, ordered for the dead soldier a cremation with full military honours, announced that the soldiers retained all their ancient courage and efficiency, and declared the review over. A foreign visitor was shocked at the seemingly cruel order of the king and told him that the whole thing was barbarous in the extreme. 'No,' replied Kirtivarman, 'this is not more barbarous than war in general. War implies implicit obedience to command, undaunted bravery, and readiness to die at a moment's notice. All these were tested now by selecting one man at random, and his relations are rewarded. Some kings indulge in bloody wars involving the loss of

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countless lives in order to keep their soldiers fit. I keep my soldiers fit by an occasional sacrifice of one life. So long as the demon of war remains, this is inevitable.'

XXXIII. WOMEN ARE INFERIOR

'WOMEN are, and will always remain, inferior,' said a mere man. 'They are unable to fight, and this physical defect can never be cured even if all other defects are cured. And how can women who require the constant protection of men for the elementary function of self-defence claim equality with their defenders?'

'By the same kind of argument, men are, and will always remain, inferior,' retorted a woman. 'They are unable to bring forth children, and this physical defect can never be cured even if all other defects are cured. And how can men who require the constant protection of the children of women for the elementary function of self-defence claim equality with women?'

XXXIV. THE BRAHMIN AND THE VEDAS

'WHAT profit do you get from reading the Vedas,¹ oh Brahmin?' asked an atheist of a

¹ Hindu scriptures.

very religious Brahmin who was constantly reading these scriptures. 'Spiritual consolation,' replied the Brahmin. 'Pooh, what is the good of that?' asked the atheist. 'Nothing but money counts.'

'No,' replied the Brahmin, 'money is certainly not the most important thing in the world.' 'It is,' asserted the atheist, 'nothing counts beside money.' 'Still, you love your son though he costs you a good bit. Would you rather lose your only son or all your money?' asked the Brahmin. 'Of course, all my money,' replied the atheist warmly. 'Well, if there is such a spiritual consolation in having a son, surely you can understand the spiritual consolation of reading the sacred scriptures,' replied the Brahmin.

XXXV. THE FALSE WITNESS TRAPPED

IT was a sensational suit between the villagers on one side and a powerful landlord on the other regarding the ownership of a tank. The landlord was rich, and had hired many false witnesses to speak on his behalf. His contention was that the tank was not of immemorial antiquity but was newly constructed by his father forty-five years back at his own expense. Those were

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days when kings were judges and formal procedure was paid little heed to, and the main attempt was to find out the truth by any method. There was one particularly important witness who had been induced by heavy bribes to give false evidence in favour of the landlord who agreed to stand or fall by his evidence. When he was brought before him, the king asked him, 'Are you not a strong partisan of the landlord?' 'No,' replied the witness. 'Have you not been bribed by him to give false evidence?' asked the king. 'Never,' said the witness indignantly. 'I put it to you that you are going to depose that the tank was constructed forty-five years ago by the landlord's father,' said the king. 'Not at all,' replied the witness who was afraid that he was found out and would be punished for giving false evidence besides losing his reputation for ever. 'Not at all. The tank is, as a matter of fact, an ancient tank dating from immemorial times. I am now eighty-seven years old. I have seen the tank ever since I was five years old, and my father and grandfather have told me that it existed even when they were children of five. So your majesty sees that I came here only to speak the truth.' 'I cannot say that you came here with that purpose,' said the king laughing,

‘ but I am certain that you have spoken the truth now.’

XXXVI. THE FIRST COSMOPOLITAN INSTITUTION

‘ WHAT was the first cosmopolitan institution?’ asked a king of his learned men one day promising a handsome prize to the person who gave the correct answer.

‘ The family,’ said one, ‘ for all races had the family, and that was the earliest institution common to all the world.’ But the others attacked this on the ground that there were several races who never had families in any sense of the term, they having moved about only in herds like cattle, and that even those races which had the family did not mean by the family the same institution, the Hindus having meant by it huge joint families embracing even tenth cousins, and Europeans having included therein, only the husband, wife and children, thus excluding even the father and the mother. So, this solution was not accepted. Another learned man said, ‘ Marriage, oh sire, was the first cosmopolitan institution,’ but hundreds of others proved that it could not have been so since many early communities did not have the institution of

marriage, they being in the state of promiscuity. A third learned man said that God was the first cosmopolitan institution, but it took little time for the others to smash this as several communities had not any conception of God and as even all the communities having the conception did not agree in the attributes or even the description of God. Then, a learned man rose from the back row and said, 'The first cosmopolitan institution, oh king, was neither the family nor marriage nor God, but the devil. There has never been a race or community which did not recognize the devil. There is also a remarkable unanimity about him. Cloven feet, extreme wickedness, uncanny cleverness, inordinate love of blood and mischief, eternal vigilance and untiring activity are attributes ascribed to him everywhere. He, if anything, is the first cosmopolitan institution.' All agreed that this was so, and the king gave this learned man the prize.

XXXVII. THE MAID SERVANT

SAMBAN was a very poor boy. His father died when he was five years old leaving nothing behind except his widow and son. The widow resolved that her son should not suffer because of the death of his father. So she worked like a slave in order to

feed him well and to give him a good schooling. Early in the morning, she used to go all over the countryside gathering cowdung for making into cakes to be sold as firewood to the villagers. She used to keep a buffalo and sell its milk, curds, buttermilk and ghee. She would go for cooking, pounding rice, preparing sweetmeats and other menial occupations in rich houses whenever the chance occurred and thus get a meal and one or two coppers. She used also to prepare and sell some pickles and sweetmeats herself. Every day, she also went out for grass-cutting to the hills and brought enough grass to feed her buffalo and to sell some to the neighbours. By all these means, she managed to earn enough money to feed, clothe and educate her son very well. He always ate voraciously, and, when he was sixteen, was a giant six feet three inches in height and forty-two inches round the chest. He invariably put on costly clothes. The poor widow, she ate the coarsest food and dressed herself in rags in order that her son might have excellent food, clothing and education. At last, just as the boy attained the age of sixteen, he passed his matriculation examination with credit. The poor mother's joy knew no bounds. She looked forward to the day when her son would

get a decent job and give her in her old age peace of mind and complete rest. No doubt, the boy had not been so loving as he should have been, but she attributed it to his tender years, and hoped that the advance of years would make him behave better. Four more years passed, years of even more strenuous toil for the widow since the college course was more costly. Samban was very affectionate whenever he wanted money for his watch or ties and collars, but at other times it struck the poor widow that he was cold, curt and disrespectful towards her. At the end of the four years, Samban took his degree with flying colours ; great was the mother's joy.

A month after Samban took his degree, he was offered a post as private secretary by a wealthy public man who was attracted by the boy's appearance, clothes and outward polish. He intended to give Samban Rs. 150 per month and told him so. So greatly was he attracted towards the boy that he even accompanied him to his house. There, in the courtyard, sat Samban's mother clad in miserable rags, making cowdung into cakes with her hands. She was mere skin and bones, her face was lean and haggard, and her eyes were weary with endless toil. The lady rose up on seeing her son and another come, and

asked Samban where he had been. Samban curtly told her that he had been nowhere in particular and hastily went into his room which was furnished moderately despite the great poverty of the widow. The wealthy man asked Samban who the lady outside was, and Samban, without a moment's hesitation, told him that she was the maid servant, being ashamed and unwilling to own a woman in rags engaged in making cowdung cakes as his mother. The prospective employer went away mightily satisfied with Samban, promising to issue an order of appointment the next day. As soon as he went out of the house, he saw a friend who asked him why he had been to Samban's house. 'I want to make that boy my private secretary on Rs. 150 per mensem,' said the wealthy public man. 'I am so very glad,' replied the friend, 'for it will rejoice the poor widow who brought him up with so much trouble to herself.' 'Where is she?' asked the public man, 'I should like to see her.'

'Why, she is making cowdung cakes outside the house, didn't you see her?' asked the friend. 'My God,' said the public man. 'Then she was the boy's mother, and he falsely told me that she was the maid servant. I shall never appoint such an ungrateful wretch as my private secretary.'

‘I cannot blame you for reconsidering the matter after what you have told me,’ said the friend. Then they parted.

The next day, no order of appointment came. So, Samban, attiring himself in his best clothes and duly shaved and scented, went to the public man and asked him why he had not received the order. ‘Because,’ replied the public man, ‘I thought that a man capable of disowning a mother to whom he owed everything and calling her a maid servant was not fit to be appointed to the responsible post of private secretary to a public man to whom he would owe nothing but the post,’ and he asked the gate porter to show Samban the door.

XXXVIII. WHY HE SHAVED HIS HEAD

‘WHY do you shave your head like a widow, O Sanyasi?’¹ asked a man of a *sanyasi*. ‘Because my marriage too has ended,’ replied the *sanyasi*. ‘But you were never married, oh *sanyasi*’² said the other. ‘Yes, I was,’ replied the *sanyasi*. ‘To whom?’ asked the man in

¹ Both Hindu monks and orthodox Brahmin widows shave their heads completely.

² A particular order of Hindu monks cannot marry.

wonder. 'To the world,' was the reply. 'If so, the world is not dead,' said the man. 'Yes, it is dead for me,' replied the *sanyasi*.

XXXIX. OMENS

THE Hindus of Malabar have great faith in omens. When they go on a journey, they are very particular about the animals or things they first come across in the opposite direction. Certain things like fire, or a group of Brahmins, a corpse, a married woman, etc., are auspicious, but certain other things like meat, a single Brahmin, a cat, a widow, etc., are most inauspicious. If the purpose of the journey is to be achieved, an auspicious object must come first. Since, in this world, one can never be sure of what one will come across first, it is quite usual for these Malabar people to watch for a favourable omen and then start.

In a village lying from north to south, there were two houses adjoining one another. The owners of both the houses were Brahmins. One was an elderly gentleman and the other a respectable widow. One morning, both of them wanted to go out on important business in opposite directions. The widow came to the door and was about to start when she saw her neighbour

starting in the opposite direction. She hurriedly went back into the house on seeing this most inauspicious omen. The single Brahmin also hastily retreated into his house for the same reason. After some time, the widow thought that the other must have gone and so again came to the door to start. But the other also had argued in the same way and had come to the door to start. Both again went inside their respective houses hurriedly. This time, the widow resolved to wait a long time so as to be certain of the other's departure. But, alas, the single Brahmin also had resolved likewise. So, when they again came to their doors to start, in the expectation that the other would have gone long ago, they found themselves again about to start in opposite directions. The single Brahmin was about to rush in for the third time when the widow called him and said, 'Look here, neighbour, both of us are behaving most foolishly. The superstitious people regard you and me as most inauspicious things to meet. Neither you nor I like this. Still, we are treating each other as inauspicious omens and lending weight to the world's calumny of us in addition to delaying our own businesses. Why should we foul our own nests? Come, let us go on our errands without

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more ado.' The other¹ agreed, and both went at once, regardless of the inauspicious omen.

XL. HOW FAR CAN A MAN SEE?

'How far can a man see?' asked a monk in a big Buddhist assembly. Three miles, five miles, ten miles, twenty miles, were some of the replies. 'As far as he likes to see,' said a very old and venerable monk. 'No,' said the questioner. 'Can he see across the Himalayas?'

'Yes, if he likes,' replied the other. 'Can he see across the black waters?'¹ asked the first.

'Yes, if he likes,' replied the other. 'Can he see the other world?' was the last desperate question.

'Yes, if he likes,' was the cool reply.

XLI. THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY REQUEST

FOUR men were sitting chatting in a club. 'What is the most extraordinary request that has ever been made to you?' asked one of the other three. 'In my case, it was a drunken soldier's calling out to me, "Come, let me put a bullet into you."'

¹ The Indian term for the ocean.

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‘ Well, the most extraordinary request I have had,’ said the second, who was a magistrate, ‘ was when a prisoner, who was being tried by me for an offence punishable with fine, on being questioned whether he had anything to say, replied, “ Yes, I request your Honour to graciously pay the fine for me.” ’

‘ The most extraordinary request made to me ’ said the third who was a hangman, ‘ was when a chap whom I was about to hang, on being casually asked by me in the usual formal way whether he had any last request to make, said “ Yes, for the love of God, exchange places with me.” ’

‘ The most extraordinary request made to me,’ said the fourth ‘ was by a man who signed himself Watkins and had put up an advertisement like this, “ Excellent Coffins—Keep Corpses cool and comfortable—Select places for burial—Corpses encased in these coffins and buried in our grounds sleep like a top till Dooms-Day and then rise up earliest at the beat of the drum—It is a real *de luxe* burial—Come, have a try ! ” ’

XLII. THE GREATEST OF GOD'S CREATURES

A RICH man, who was inordinately proud of his riches and had an unconcealed contempt for

learning, birth, rank and other qualities since he had none of these himself, once asked a cynic, 'Which is the greatest of God's creatures?'

'The monkey,' was the reply.

'What!' asked the rich man astounded at this choice. 'Why on earth do you prefer the monkey to the other animals and, above all, to man?'

'Because,' replied the cynic, 'among men, who are generally considered to be the greatest among God's creatures, money counts most, and he who has a good purse is reckoned learned, handsome, witty and what not. And yet no man is born with a purse. As for other animals except the monkey, they are neither born with purses nor do they acquire them. Every monkey, however, is born with two purses,¹ and *you* must agree that it is therefore certainly the greatest of God's creatures.'

XLIII. THE COW'S REASON

AN international tourist, who was versed in cow language, once asked a cow, 'Do you like to live in India or in England?' 'In India,' replied the cow. 'Why, do you get better treatment in India?' asked he. 'No, of course, not,'

¹ The reference is to the two pouches in the mouth of the monkey.

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said the cow, 'you know it as well as I do. Left to myself, I would like to live in neither country. In England I am fed well and sacrificed, in India I am either starved and sacrificed, or starved and kept just living. You will see that here the English treatment is better.'

'Then why do you prefer India?' asked the world traveller. 'It is not bread alone that counts, there is something far higher and nobler, sentiment and self-respect,' replied the cow. 'In India I am classed with the highest caste, the Brahmin, and worshipped reverently. Once every year¹ I am garlanded and decorated and taken in procession. All this shows that I am not arrogantly treated as a mere beast, something apart and radically different from man, as in England.' 'But you starve and are ill-treated in India,' said the tourist. 'True, but, then, many of India's millions starve, and I starve with them. Few starve me purposely. And, then, if I am ill-treated, so is the Indian woman. All my sorrows disappear when I find the tearful eyes, the dark, soft, loving, and awfully expressive, but, alas, all too often tearful eyes of the Indian woman hiding all her untold sorrows. I then

¹ On Cow Pongal day.

forget my sorrows in hers. Both of us gaze into one another's eyes, companions in sorrow, and are consoled. I cannot get this consolation in England,' said the cow.

XLIV. THE ROTTEN MELON

A MAN died leaving three sons behind. He had also left a beautiful ripe melon which he had raised by his exertions. All the sons loved their father tenderly. So great was their love and respect for him and for the melon raised by him that they thought it the most perfect melon in the world and would never allow anybody to contra-dict this statement. They kept the melon in a prominent place in the house with a view to preserve and display it. It was kept so long that, it rotted and stunk all over the place. The three sons conferred together as to what they should do with it.

'Let us preserve it as we have done before till it disappears altogether,' said the first. 'It does not matter how much it stinks and how many diseases it brings on us. We want our ancestral melon in its pristine state even if we die for it. Let none tamper with it. The wisdom of our father was so great that we cannot improve on it and should not impiously try to do so.'

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‘ Let us throw this wretched stinking thing away and buy some melon from our neighbours,’ said the second. ‘ It is a disgrace to us to keep this rotten melon. It will make us the laughing-stock of the world besides poisoning us by its foul stench and the resultant germs of disease. I am now of opinion that any melon is as good as our ancestral melon. Nay, even better, for other melons are not rotten as ours is.’

‘ Let us throw away the dead waste but retain the ancient seeds and plant them and get fresh melons which will be ancestral as well as good and pure,’ said the third. ‘ To keep this rotten melon till worms eat it up completely will be to incur the ridicule of our neighbours, to contract some deadly diseases and, in the end, to lose our precious heritage. To throw the whole thing away and buy some new melon will be equally foolish for we will thereby not only lose our ancestral heritage and waste much money in buying new melons which we can never call our own, but these melons also will rot just the same as our ancestral melon if kept as long as that. Renewal is the essence of life and progress, but always the new thing must be born from the seeds of the past and must have its roots in the past though the manures may be altered to suit

the seasons, and graftings may be made to improve the fruit.'

The third brother's advice was accepted by the other two.

XLV. THE DRASTIC REMEDY

A DOTING father and mother had an only son. He was a bit of an idiot. In spite of costly tuition, the boy learnt nothing though he was all attention during his lessons. His fond parents finally engaged the very best tutor in the whole country but all to no purpose. Six months after employing him, the father asked the tutor, 'What is wrong with our boy? We have given him the best tutors, the best books, the best associates and the best advice and yet he never seems to improve. How to remedy his defect?'

'Change his head, that is what he wants,' said the exasperated tutor.

XLVI. A MORE MISERABLE STATE

A PERSISTENT beggar was troubling all travellers on the road with his never-ending and none too graceful cries for charity. One day, he approached a group of travellers and said, 'I have nothing, absolutely nothing. Why won't you

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give me something? Is there any man more miserable than I?'

'Oh, yes, there is,' said a caustic passer-by, 'you at least have only nothing, no assets and no liabilities. There are many men with no assets and heavy liabilities. You are much happier than they, or ought to be.'

XLVII. THERE IS A WORSE

THERE was a Jain who starved himself to death. All through his starvation he was contemplating on the other world and spiritualities. Just before his death he exclaimed, 'I see nothing.'

'What is the use of all his religious meditation and starving?' asked a sceptic, 'ultimately, he himself confessed that when he was dying he saw nothing.'

'That is more than what you can hope for,' was the biting retort of a by-stander. 'You will see something dreadful when you die.'

XLVIII. WHY LAWS CHANGE

A MAN asked a sage, 'Why, oh sage, are different laws prescribed for different *yugas*? Thus for Krita Yuga Manu's laws are prescribed, for Treta

Ages: The Hindu cycle of ages is Krita, Treta, Dwapara, Kali.'

the laws of Gautama, for Dwapura the laws of Sankha and Likhita, and for Kali the laws of Parasara.'

'Time changes and with the time the laws,' replied the sage.

'Why should they?' asked the man. 'The laws, if they are perfect, should abide always.' 'Time determines what is perfection,' replied the sage, '*Dharma*¹ had in Krita Yuga four legs, in Treta three, in Dwapura two, and in Kali has only one. How can a man lie down in the same position on a cot when it has four, three, two and one leg?'

XLIX. WHAT THUNDER SAYS

'WHAT is the meaning of thunder, hear the views of our ancients,' said a great scholar 'Da! Da! Da! Da! Give, give, give, give (to others), that is what the divine voice of thunder says. Da! Da! Da! Da! Be forgiving, that is what the divine voice of thunder says. Da! Da! Da! Da! Learn, Learn, Learn, that is what the divine voice of thunder says.'

'It said all that in the Krita, Treta and Dwapura Yugas² but not now in the Kali

¹ Righteousness.

² The Golden, Silver and Bronze ages.

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Yuga.¹ All that it says now is Da ! Da ! Da ! Da ! Give (me), give (me), give (me), give (me) the sole cry of this iron age.'

L. THE IMPOSSIBLE CONDITION

A HINDU husband lectured to his wife on her duties like chastity, implicit obedience, boundless love, endless forbearance, untiring industry, etc. When he had finished, she said, 'I shall now tell you what I consider to be a husband's duties. Firstly, he is to provide food and clothing for his wife and children.' 'Of course,' said the husband, 'that goes without saying.'

'Then, he should love his wife dearly,' said the wife.

'Yes, that also can easily be done,' remarked the husband.

'He should have nothing to do with other women,' said she. 'That also can be done with an effort,' replied he.

'He should not beat her or scold her,' said she. 'Impossible,' said the husband. 'How can a husband watch his wife's wilful faults and not punish her corporeally ?'

¹ The iron age, the worst of the ages ; we are living in this age.

‘ How does a wife watch her husband’s wilful faults and not punish him corporeally? You also must be able to do the same thing if really men are superior to women in every respect as you are never tired of dinning into my ears,’ replied the wife.

LI. A SO-CALLED BENEFACTOR

A CHOULTRY-EATER used to take his meals regularly in a choultry endowed by a rich man of old. But when he was sixty and had lost his physical strength, the choultry was closed for lack of funds. He knew no means of earning a living. And nobody would give him anything. So he starved. He cursed the endower of the choultry. ‘ Damn his philanthropy!’ said he. ‘ These so-called benefactors are the real foes of humanity, for they bund up Nature’s outlets and bring about stagnation, decay and worse. To satisfy their vanity and to secure a seat in Heaven and a name in this world they offer us helpless human beings as sacrifice Why, this is downright human sacrifice! What else? My intelligence and faculties were allowed to lie fallow and even to be perverted by the existence of this choultry which has deserted me now in my declining years when I most need it. Alas, I chose wooden legs for !

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my own natural legs owing to this wretched philanthropist's tempting choultry. Accursed be he and such as he !'

LII. A PUBLIC SOCIETY OF THIEVES

ONCE, some thieves tried to start a public society of thieves, proud of their profession, not ashamed to own it in public and prepared to agitate for legalizing theft. The mover of the resolution said in his opening speech, 'Gentlemen, it is our unwillingness to own our profession in public and our neglect to get theft legalized that are responsible for our deplorable state. Let us remedy these twin evils by starting a society on the lines indicated in the notice circulated among you all.'

Then the cleverest of the thieves opposed the motion on the ground of its impracticability. 'Theft cannot be legalized,' said he, 'because thieves themselves do not like their articles, even their stolen articles, to be stolen any more than robbers like to be robbed and murderers to be murdered. And, so long as theft is not legalized, no thief will dare to own his profession in public for fear of the prison. Hence the whole motion is chimerical.'

LIH. THE DUPLICATE KEYS

A CERTAIN wealthy Hindu from Madras went on a pilgrimage to Benares. He had never seen the holy city before and was very anxious as to how he would manage there. As usual with such pilgrims, he had taken a thousand rupees with him for meeting the expenses of the pilgrimage. He had also two big trunks containing various articles of clothing. As soon as the train reached Benares, a saintly-looking person peeped into the compartment and asked the pilgrim whether he had come on a pilgrimage. 'Yes,' said the pilgrim, 'and I hardly know how to manage for the period I shall have to spend here.' 'Rid your mind of anxiety,' said the other, 'for I shall provide you with lodging and boarding. I am a Madrasi myself.'

'But I shall be putting you to undue trouble,' said the pilgrim, inwardly very much relieved. 'Not at all; is it not said in our scriptures that this body is given to us only for the sake of doing good to others? Let me assure you, it is a real pleasure to me to see you,' replied the other.

'What is your name, if I am not inquisitive?' asked the pilgrim, delighted at his housing and boarding problem being solved.

‘Jagannath Pranatyagi,’¹ said the other.

Then Jagannath without further ado engaged a taxi and soon drove with the pilgrim and his belongings to his house which was a spacious one. The pilgrim was given a magnificent room all to himself, and his things also were carefully placed there.

‘What is the rent?’ asked the pilgrim.

‘Nothing,’ said Jagannath. ‘What an absurd question! I am not a landlord. It is enough for me that I have been of service to you.’

‘But you must take something for my boarding at least,’ said the pilgrim, inwardly delighted.

‘What are you talking about?’ asked Jagannath in an injured voice. ‘Take money for meals! What next?’

‘I am sorry to have offended you,’ said the pilgrim climbing down. ‘But we never find such disinterested people in Madras. What is the reason.’

‘The reason is simple enough. The religious atmosphere of holy Kasi brings about the change. In the presence of Viswanatha² all mean thoughts, mean suspicions, melt away.’

¹ Pranatyagi—One who is ready to sacrifice his life.

² Lord of the Universe, Siva; the principal temple at Benares is Viswanath’s.

Ah, that must be the reason,' said the pilgrim.

'What else?' asked Jagannath, 'I was not myself so devoted to others when I was in Madras. Well, now, here are your lock and keys' and Jagannath gave the pilgrim an excellent lock with duplicate keys.

'Why should I lock my room?' asked the pilgrim. 'It will be mean to suspect others of evil designs towards my property.'

'Quite,' said Jagannath, 'but, still, lock your room. I have crossed the stage of suspicion, but that is because I have crossed the stage of desiring to possess anything. I have renounced all property and so I do not lock the door. But you must have some money, and cling to it, and so must lock the room to avoid suspecting others.'

'I have got a thousand rupees and some clothes, that is all,' said the pilgrim. 'I think I will lock the room since you do not lock the house. But, Jagannath, you say you have renounced all your property. Who owns this house, then?'

'Oh, the house is mine, but I hold it, like my body, entirely for the service of others.'

'Why give me both the keys?' asked the pilgrim.

'Because you may have all the keys of the lock so as to feel fully secure,' said Jagannath. 'Now let us go and take our meals.' The meals were splendid. The pilgrim was immensely satisfied. He said, 'Jagannath, I must give you at least a hundred rupees for all your services. You can use this amount for serving others.'

'Alright,' said Jagannath, 'as you like.'

After meals, Jagannath took the pilgrim to see the city. 'To-morrow,' said Jagannath, 'we shall begin the bathing, the temple-going and the ceremonies.' The pilgrim left all his money and belongings behind except a few rupees and a few articles of clothing he was wearing. He locked the room carefully and took the keys. Jagannath did not lock the door. 'What about the vessels and other things?' asked the pilgrim. 'There is nobody in the house. Where are your servants?'

'I have none,' said Jagannath, 'I myself serve others. A servant should have no servants.'

'Who cooked the meals, then?' asked the pilgrim astonished. 'I myself,' said Jagannath. 'You are a saint, Jagannath,' said the pilgrim. 'Oh, no,' said Jagannath half deprecatingly.

'Suppose somebody steals your things,' asked the pilgrim. 'They are not my things,' replied

the other, 'being dedicated to the public.' If a member of the public steals the vessels of the public, I consider it hardly theft.'

The two then went round the city and had an enjoyable time of it. 'It was late in the evening when they returned. Jagannath went to the kitchen to cook, and the pilgrim to his room. The pilgrim was in the best of spirits and was humming to himself. He opened the lock and entered the room. What was his horror when he found his trunks broken open and his thousand rupees and all the articles of clothing gone! And yet the lock of the room had been intact! He rushed to the kitchen and told Jagannath about the burglary. 'Ah,' said Jagannath, 'the kitchen articles also have been stolen and the thieves have even broken the mud pots which they did not want to take with them.' It was as Jagannath had said. At first the pilgrim had suspected Jagannath, but now his conscience smote him. 'We must complain to the police at once,' said the pilgrim. 'I do not want to complain,' said Jagannath, 'on principle. You may if you like. But, then, you say you found the lock intact. Who will believe that you had a thousand rupees and clothes to lose?'

The pilgrim was bewildered. 'You know that

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'I had them,' said he. 'I don't know,' said Jagannath smiling 'you told me you had them. I saw only your two trunks, and you say they are still here.' 'But their contents are missing,' said the pilgrim. 'You knew that they contained something.'

'Yes, but the police might say that they contained nothing but stones and straw and that you might have thrown them away and broken the locks of the trunks simply to concoct a case. Afterwards you may even be put up for filing a false complaint,' said Jagannath. This terrified the pilgrim. 'I won't complain also,' said the pilgrim. 'How are we to manage now?' 'Wire for some money from home,' said Jagannath. 'As for myself, I shall start again with the hundred rupees you have generously promised.'

The poor pilgrim bit his lips at this. He suspected this saint. But how to accuse him to his face and how to substantiate the accusation when he had been given both the keys, when Jagannath himself had accompanied him, when there was nobody else in the house, and when Jagannath's things themselves had been stolen? He bowed to the inevitable, he urgently wired for one thousand rupees more, and got the amount within eight hours.

‘Now, we must purchase new utensils and begin again,’ said Jagannath with his usual smile. The poor pilgrim did not like to go back on his word. Most unwillingly, he parted with one hundred rupees more and then took a quick leave of Jagannath Pranatyagi.

All through his pilgrimage the pilgrim was brooding over the loss. After the pilgrimage was over, he returned home and in the company of his wife and children soon forgot about Jagannath Pranatyagi.

Three years afterwards, while reading his newspaper, he found in big headlines ‘THE DUPLICATE KEYS—A TRIPLICATE KEPT—A NOTORIOUS GANG’S RECORD AT BENARES—JAGANNATH PRANATYAGI TRAPPED AND SENTENCED TO TWO YEARS’ RIGOROUS IMPRISONMENT.’ The pilgrim laughed long and loud, and, running to his wife, said, ‘Dearest, Jagannath Pranatyagi’s body is given to him only for the sake of doing good to others for the next two years.’

LIV. THIS IS NOT JUSTICE

ACCORDING to the ancient Hindu criminal law a snake-worshipper was held legally liable for death caused to lawful passers-by by the snakes he

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worshipped if the snakes which caused the death were proved to have come from the worshipper's compound and bitten a man passing close to its hedges. One day, a poor man was bitten by a deadly cobra as he was going along a lane close to a snake-worshipper's compound. The man died, and the snake-worshipper was put up for abetment of murder, convicted and sentenced to receive twenty-four stripes by the king.

‘Sire, this is not justice,’ said the snake-worshipper. ‘How am I responsible for the doings of a snake although I worshipped it and it came out of my compound?’

‘You are responsible,’ said the king. ‘It is because you fed and worshipped it that it prospered and found a safe refuge. But for your worshipping it, people might have killed it. You would not allow it to be killed because you worshipped it, and were unable by your prayer to prevent its killing others. So you are liable for abetment of murder.’

‘Sire,’ said the man, ‘if I am to be held liable for my god's murders, what about others who worship the One Living God who is supposed to send all the plagues and pestilences on earth to punish men by killing a good many of them? Do they not deserve to be punished for murder

every day almost, and, in times of pestilences, many times a day? And yet none of them are punished. Why this injustice?' 'It is not injustice,' said the king, 'because the connection of the One Living God with the murders you mentioned has not been established whereas the connection of your god with this murder is established only too well.'

'That is because the One Living God is invisible,' said the snake-worshipper. 'You also confine your worship to invisible snakes and then you too shall not be held liable for their murders,' said the king laughing. 'Meanwhile, let the sentence be executed,' said he to his servants, and the sentence was duly executed.

LV. AVOID A PALMYRA TREE

A SECT of Hindus could not climb up or even stand at the foot of a palmyra tree by caste rules in order to avoid even the suspicion of drinking toddy which is mostly extracted from these trees in the part of the country inhabited by this sect. During annual gatherings one of the first commandments was 'Avoid a palmyra tree.' On one of these annual occasions, a great religious teacher of the sect reiterated with vehemence the old maxim 'Avoid a palmyra tree. Never climb

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up a palmyra tree.' This was received with loud applause. But a reformer among the audience stood up and said, 'This is silly. It depends on the man. An honest man can climb up the tree for taking its leaves, so useful for thatching and firewood, and for gathering its tender fruits so good and wholesome to eat. Merely because toddy also is given by the same tree, are we to avoid it? A man so inclined may get his toddy without ever seeing a palmyra tree or going near it. What respect will we have for a man who shuts himself up in his room and boasts that he does not steal, or for one who never sees women for fear of being possessed by lewd thoughts? Our religious leader's argument will equally apply if some one were to ask us to avoid walking lest our legs should carry us to some toddy shop or brothel or even to commit wholesale suicide lest we should commit some sins if we were to continue to live.' The caste panchayat saw the soundness of the reformer's argument and substituted new slogans for its social uplift.

LVI. PHYSICAL FORCE ALONE COUNTS

'PHYSICAL force alone counts among men,' said a believer in the good old 'blood and iron'

policy to a philosopher friend of his. 'Everything else is naught and can achieve absolutely nothing.' 'You are wrong,' replied the philosopher. 'Take the case of a baby, an old man, a sick man and a woman. All these physically effete persons can extort from us what no physical force ever can.'

LVII. MEDITATING ON GOD

A MAN who wanted to see God by means of deep meditation sat on the bank of a lonely tank and plunged in meditation concentrating his mind on God. God wanted to test him. So, taking the form of a small boy, He pretended to be drowning in the tank and cried out frantically for help. The man heard the cries, looked up, saw the drowning boy, was inclined to go to his rescue, but finally stayed behind in order to concentrate on his own meditation and see God sooner. The cries for help became more and more pathetic, but he did not stir from his place. He shut his eyes so as not to see the drowning boy and went on meditating. 'Wretch, you shall never see me,' said God from the skies. 'He who would not save a drowning child cannot see me or attain Heaven.' 'But I was engaged in meditating on you, oh Lord of the Universe,' said the man deeply

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chagrined. 'If you were so plunged in meditation as not to hear or see, it may be an excuse, but you did hear and see and yet did not stir from your place. Most selfish of men, this is not the way to secure Heaven or see God,' said the divine voice.

LVIII. THE RELATIVITY OF MUCH

A COOLY, who was poor as a churchmouse, one evening while about to return home, told a rich man, to whose house he had been to work, that in a monstrous ant-hill by the side of an unfrequented road there was much money guarded by cobras, that everybody passing that way used to put some money into the holes and that he had seen this with his own eyes. The rich man's cupidity was roused but he wanted to make sure that the thing was not a hoax. 'If so, why did you not dig up the ant-hill and take the money?' asked he.

'What! take the money guarded by the holy cobra!' exclaimed the cooly horrified. 'What superstitious fellows these are!' thought the rich man, but he had now no doubt about the truth of the story. He gave the cooly five rupees and asked him to indicate the spot with precision and not to

tell it to anybody else till further orders. The cooly indicated the spot, promised secrecy and then said, 'You have given me ever so much money, master.' 'What a fool!' thought the rich man. 'He does not know my designs.' Then, turning to the cooly, he said, 'Money is meant to be given to poor people like you. You may go now. Keep the secret.' 'I will,' said the cooly and departed. That very night, the rich man went with some trustworthy coolies to the ant-hill indicated and dug it up. Out rushed three deadly cobras. One of the coolies was bitten fatally. 'Doesn't matter, I shall pay your family well,' said the rich man to him. 'Nothing is got without a risk.' When all the cobras had been killed or driven away and the money was counted, it was found to be only 214 quarter annas (Rs. 3-5-6), each rare traveller on that lonely foot-path having put a quarter-anna for the snakes. The rich man was furious. The next morning he called the cooly who informed him and asked him, 'Villain, you said there was much money in that ant-hill, and I found only three rupees, five annas and six pies.'

'And is that not much money, Sir?' asked the cooly. 'I cannot save that sum in a whole year.'

LIX. LOVE OF THAR DESERT

A RAJPUT from the Thar desert had long been resident in Oudh. One day, a native of Oudh asked him whether he did not love Oudh better than Thar desert. 'No,' said the Rajput, 'I love Thar better.' 'Is not fertile Oudh with its holy rivers a thousand times more beautiful than the sandy waterless Thar desert?' asked the scandalized citizen of Oudh. 'Yes,' replied the Rajput. 'Then, why do you love Thar more?' asked the native of Oudh. 'Because it is my own motherland,' said the Rajput, 'and you love your own mother most though other people's mothers may be more beautiful than she.'

LX. POWER LOST, PRIVILEGE LOST

A CERTAIN Brahmin was about to sacrifice a goat when a religious reformer went to him and said, 'Pray, don't sacrifice that innocent animal in the name of God. Don't do a thing you can't undo. Don't take away what you cannot give.'

'Why not?' asked the Brahmin. 'Did not the glorious Brahmins of old, including holy sages, sacrifice animals?'

'Yes, they did,' replied the reformer, 'but, then, they could resuscitate the animals after they were slaughtered. Can you do that?' 'I cannot.'

I have not got their spiritual powers,' replied the Brahmin. 'Then you cannot also claim their privileges,' said the reformer. 'Power lost, privilege lost. So release the goat and let it go.' The Brahmin did so.

LXI. POLYGAMY FRUSTRATED

A YOUNG and intensely selfish Hindu husband named Shivaram once announced his determination to marry a second wife because his wife was sick for one whole month running. The poor girl's entreaties were all in vain. 'I cannot be bothered with an invalid like you,' said he. 'I was not always an invalid,' said she. 'I was healthy for years together as you know.' 'Nor did I then think of marrying again,' said he. His friends remonstrated with him, but all to no avail. A philosopher friend told him, 'You are a beast, Shivaram. Instead of nursing your wife back to health, you are not only neglecting her, but thinking of marrying again. Which man will give his daughter in marriage to you?'

'Plenty,' said Shivaram, 'in fact, I have hardly time to prepare a sufficient number of copies of my horoscope,¹ so great is the rush of offers.'

¹ Orthodox Hindus marry after consulting horoscopes.

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‘You are right,’ said the philosopher. ‘Our land is accursed.’ He thought for some time, and then a brilliant idea occurred to him. ‘Well,’ said he to Shivaram, ‘since you are bent upon marrying, it is as well that you should marry some auspicious girl this time. I shall come with you and we shall go all over the country searching for the healthiest, wealthiest, prettiest and most auspicious girl for you.’

Shivaram was delighted. The next day, he and the philosopher started for a distant country village where the philosopher said there were many girls of the type he described. They went to a house, saw an enchanting girl, and began settling the preliminaries with her parents. ‘Let us talk about those things to-morrow,’ said the parents. ‘To-night let us feast.’ So they feasted. A powerful purgative, whose effect would last for three days, was mixed in the dishes given to Shivaram, and so he began purging an hour after meals. ‘Throw that wretch out of the house,’ shouted the parents of the enchanting girl. ‘We don’t want a cholera patient here.’ The very word ‘Cholera’ struck terror into Shivaram’s soul. He implored to be allowed to remain for the night there, but this was curtly refused, ‘We can’t be bothered with a cholera patient,’ said the

parents of the girl, and asked their servants to take Shivaram bodily and throw him into the middle of a lonely moor in that dark night. The servants did as directed, and poor Shivaram was left in that God-forsaken moor, alone, in pitch darkness, purging numberless times. He cried for the philosopher, but he was not to be seen anywhere. Shivaram's soul froze with terror. He cursed the day when he left his house, cursed the day when he thought of remarriage, and wished that he were back again in his house with his invalid wife. Gradually he became weaker and weaker with purging and was about to lose consciousness when the philosopher came and asked him, 'Shivaram, do you now feel what illness is and how heartless it is to desert sick people?'

'I do, I do,' said Shivaram. 'Cure my sickness and take me back home and I promise you that I shall treat my wife properly and never remarry, never.'

'Swear,' said the philosopher. Shivaram swore the most solemn oaths. The philosopher then gave him the antidote to the purgative and took him to a miserable hovel where he was given some rice gruel. The purging ceased, and Shivaram gradually regained his lost strength.

In two days, he was well enough to return home with the philosopher. He was glad to be back at home. The philosopher had sent word to Shivaram's wife about the oaths. The very news made that lady pick up remarkably well. Shivaram embraced his wife and said, 'Dearest, I too have felt what disease is like now. Forgive me for my sins. But for the philosopher and the oaths I gave, I would have perished of cholera on that lonely moor.' The philosopher smiled, but said nothing.

LXII. PINDARI¹ PHILOSOPHY

A MAHRATTA and a Pindari were fighting side by side in a big battle which the Mahrattas were waging with their enemy. When the fighting became serious, the Pindari soldier began to run away. 'Shame on you! Why do you run away?' asked his Mahratta comrade. 'If you run away to-day, you can fight to-morrow whereas if you fight and die to-day you cannot fight to-morrow,' replied the Pindari. 'But then you never fight,' said the Mahratta.

'No, only rob when there is no serious fight and no great risk to life. It is more pleasant

¹ Pindaris—A set of freebooters and marauders who often fought on the side of the Mahrattas.

and there is less trouble, and that is the good old Pindari way. Fighting when there is no chance of loot is against all laws of *Dharma* and is fighting for fighting's sake which is the beast's way,' said the Pindari, and ran as fast as his legs would carry him.

LXIII. THE BIGGEST TRADE IN AMERICA

A HOT discussion raged in a club as to what was the biggest trade in America. Some were for the iron and steel trade, others for the motor trade, others for the oil trade, still others for the trade in textiles, and others for various other trades. No conclusion acceptable to all seemed to be likely to be reached when a member said, 'Stop all these discussions, gentlemen, the biggest trade in America is undoubtedly advertising.' And all agreed.

LXIV. PREPARED TO GO TO HELL

THE great law-giver Manu said that impotent people, reprobates, the born blind and deaf, madmen, idiots, dumb men and people lacking a limb should be held to be unfit to be heirs but that those who succeeded to the properties to which

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they would otherwise have succeeded were bound to give them food and clothing worthy of their position on pain of falling into the deepest Hell. Till the other day, this was the law applicable to Hindus in British India, and, even to-day, some Hindu states follow it.

In one of the states where the law holds good even now, the heir to a rich estate was a man born blind. He had no children. So the whole estate went to his younger brother who was so cruel that he refused to give even food and clothing to his blind elder brother. The blind man complained to the courts. The younger brother appeared in court and said that he was prepared to fall into the deepest Hell and that that was all the punishment prescribed by Manu for refusing maintenance to such disinherited persons. The Judge, however, said that Manu had declared that all people who wilfully chose Hell were reprobates and that in this case he had specifically said that persons who refused to maintain disinherited relatives were 'extreme reprobates' and so, in the end, ordered that the younger brother also should be disinherited and that the estate should go to a cousin who was directed to maintain both the disinherited brothers according to their social status.

LXV. THE BEST OF MOTHERS

‘ I AM the best of mothers, I give my baby whatever it wants,’ boasted one lady. ‘ You are the worst of mothers if what you say is true,’ said a Health Inspector. ‘ A good mother ought to give a baby what is best for it and not what it wants. You give your baby whatever it wants not out of love for it but simply to save yourself the trouble of thinking what is good for it and to sneak a cheap love from it.’

LXVI. WHY PEACE WAS IMPOSSIBLE

‘ WHY should we not leave off our age-long animosities and live in peace and happiness?’ asked a snake of a mongoose.¹

‘ Both of us will perish then,’ said the mongoose, ‘ I shall be of no use and so will be exterminated since man will not like me to eat up his things or dig holes in his garden without rendering him any service. You also will be exterminated. Freed from our havoc, your race will multiply so enormously that men will become terribly afraid and will exterminate you by making a supreme effort.’

¹ The mongoose is the deadly and dreaded enemy of the snake.

LXVII. THE VITAL DEFECT

AN Italian professor once made an artificial egg so perfect in appearance as to deceive even trained eyes. It was exactly like an egg inside and outside. 'What possible defect can you find in it?' asked he to an admiring audience. 'Hatch it' was the unexpected and crushing challenge from an old woman in a corner of the room amidst roars of laughter. 'It wants the spark of life and that is the vital defect,' said she as she walked away.

LXVIII. HIS SHOOTING ADVENTURES

A YOUNG Englishman named Jones came to India for the first time. Like others of his race and clime who had never set foot on Indian soil before, he had queer notions about Indian prejudices. The most important of them was that Indians would never allow anybody to take life if they could prevent it and that they held in special veneration bulls, monkeys, cows, cobras and crocodiles. Jones was passionately desirous of earning a name as a big game hunter. He bought a first class rifle and underwent a regular training in shooting in much the same way as the ancient Romans had their training in boating. Then,

when he considered himself a good shot, he went with his friend James, equally new to India, for tiger shooting in the reserve forests. 'The natives will not see us over there in the reserves,' said Jones to James, 'and, in any case, a tiger is not specially sacred.' A *machan*¹ was ready, and Jones and James sat in it in the moonlight waiting for the tiger to come to drink from the fountain at ten yards' distance. The Indian hunters were crouching on a branch of the same tree. Jones and James had their rifles ready. Jones had made James promise to give him the first chance to shoot. At midnight, an Indian hunter gently touched the shoulder of Jones and said, 'Sahib, shoot!' There, in the full moonlight, was the tiger, a magnificent beast nine feet long, and its eyes were facing Jones. Their magnetism was too much for Jones who had never shot at any living thing before. He pulled the trigger, but it would not go, and the rifle dropped with a noise from his shaky hands. The tiger ran away. James was furious and accused Jones of cowardice. 'I am no coward,' said Jones, 'but its eyes were too much for me.' 'Then, go shooting crocodiles in

¹ A kind of cage high up in the trees where hunters sit to shoot tigers.

the Tungabhadra,' said James, 'till you get accustomed to take life. I fear you are as soft as the natives.'

'Are there many crocodiles in the Tungabhadra?' asked Jones. 'I would love to shoot them.'

'Plenty as salted fish in a barrel,' said James, 'but I am afraid the natives may object.' 'I shall manage it somehow,' said Jones.

Some days later, Jones was on the banks of the Tungabhadra with his loaded rifle on his shoulders and spare cartridges in his pouch. He was just opposite an island where many buffaloes were grazing. He looked at the river and saw many things swimming, 'Here are the crocodiles at last,' said Jones to himself. 'By Jove, they are as numerous as salted fish in a barrel. This time no escape.' With this, he took excellent aim and shot at one of the swimming forms. Shouts from some Indians behind were heard.

'The superstitious natives are coming,' thought Jones. 'Before they come, I shall bag more crocodiles.' Bang, bang, bang, bang, the remaining four cartridges were securely lodged in four other swimming forms with unerring precision. Jones was exultant, but his joy was cooled a bit by

seeing horns rise up in the river. Jones had never heard that crocodiles had horns. Were these special crocodiles, or were they river walruses with double horns, or hippopotamuses, both of which latter animals had never been located in India? Jones was feeling the pride of a discoverer when the Indians approached him and asked 'Why have you shot our buffaloes?' 'What!' The horrible truth dawned on Jones at last, and he was crushed with shame and chagrin. He had never heard that buffaloes would be swimming in rivers, but, then, these men must know best. What is more, the expiring forms in the river and the similarity of their cries and the cries of their brothers and sisters on the island convinced Jones. He cursed James, he cursed himself, he cursed his rifle. But the Indians were pressing for damages. Jones opened his purse and paid out fifty rupees each for the five buffaloes all of which had been fatally wounded. Then, he returned with a lean purse from the banks of the Tungabhadra to his homely office and sold his rifle. 'No more shooting for me,' he said to the astonished James, 'each bullet cost me fifty rupees.' 'How?' asked James in wonder.

'That must remain a mystery,' said Jones. 'But they did, I can assure you.'

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LXIX. MILK AND WATER

‘NOTHING will suffer in any way by any kind of mixture with a better thing, however great or small the mixture,’ said a man to his friend.

‘Is milk better than water?’ asked the friend.

‘Yes’ said the man.

‘Would you like pure water for drinking or water poured into an unwashed vessel newly emptied of milk?’ asked the friend.

‘Of course, pure water,’ said the other unthinkingly.*

‘Then I have got my point,’ said the friend laughing. ‘You yourself have refuted your own theory.’

LXX. THE LAW OF KARMA¹

‘GOATS eat up forests and for this men eat goats, agreeably to the law of *Karma*,’ proclaimed an enthusiastic advocate of the conservation of forests to an admiring audience. The next speaker went one better. He said, ‘Goats eat up forests and for that are eaten by men. For this, these men are eaten up by Hell fire. For this,

¹ A Hindu school of philosophy which holds that our actions in previous births or in this determine our lot on earth.

Hell is plunged in darkness by God. For this, God has as eternal enemy the Devil. For this, all religions hate the Devil. For this, the Devil plays perpetual mischief in this world. How to prevent all this? Prevent the goats from entering the forests and eating them up !'

LXXI. WHY ROCK IS HARD

A STONE-CUTTER sweating in the hot midday and engaged in cutting stones in the burning sun cried out one day in anguish, ' How hard-hearted God is ! Why could He not have made rock a bit less hard and heavy ? He seems to delight in making poor people like me work. And yet there are fellows who say that God is merciful.' God wanted to teach the man a lesson. He suddenly made rock soft as butter and light as feather. The stone-cutter praised God, and soon cut ten times the usual quantity of rock and carried it to the town for sale as usual. ' Daily, I get eight annas. To-day, I shall earn five rupees. All this income I owe to my criticism. Even God waits for agitation to grant concessions !' said he to himself. When he reached the town, nobody would buy his stones. ' Who the devil wants this soft and light stuff ?' asked one and all. ' Go and make merry with it

yourself.' So even the usual eight annas were not got. The poor stone-cutter, his wife and children had to starve that day. That night, he prayed to God to make rock again hard and heavy. 'Oh God,' he said, 'thou knowest what is best for us. Forgive my foolishness and make rock as hard and heavy as before.' And God made rock hard and heavy once again.

LXXII. THE BEST TEMPLE

THREE Hindu pandits¹ argued as to which was the best temple, the structural temple, or the cave temple, or the temple scooped out of the living rock. Each of the three advocated a different variety. As they could not come to a common decision, they went to a saint and asked him to decide. He said, 'None of the three is the best. The best temple is that whose only building is the human soul and whose only idol is the universe around it.'

'But,' said all the three pandits together, 'your temple will cost no money whereas the three other temples will cost much time, money and energy and consequently will represent greater faith.'

¹ Learned men.

The saint smiled and said, 'It requires far greater faith to see God without any symbols than to spend time, money and energy for erecting costly buildings and gorgeous idols.'

LXXIII. TWO KINDS OF SHADE

A BANYAN tree once said to a teak, 'What a useless tree you are ! I give shade to thousands per day. What shade do you give ?'

'While you give temporary shade, I give permanent shade,' replied the teak. 'Your timber is useless, whereas mine is world-famous. People build houses with my timber and get a permanent protection from wind, rain and sun. You are useless for this. Thus I am really more useful though you are more spectacular and get more credit.' The banyan tree stood silent with shame.

LXXIV. CAN'T GET A FIRM WILL

'I CAN'T get a firm will, it is impossible,' said a weak and immoral man to a saint who was advising him to turn away from evil. 'I am by nature of weak character and was and still am easily led into immorality by my evil associates. Nothing loose by nature will become firm.'

'See how mud becomes rock in course of time

by mere natural action,' replied the saint. 'With human intelligence you ought to do better.'

LXXV. ONE REWARDED, ONE PUNISHED

A KING was surrounded by his courtiers. All were chewing betel on a balcony overlooking the palace square. They spat out the refuse into the square. The king's spittle fell on a minister who was just then entering the palace gates. The king saw this with indescribable dismay. The minister was terribly indignant, and, not knowing who had been responsible for the mischief, came to the assembly with the spittle all over his body and asked angrily, 'Who did this?' The king was very much embarrassed, for how could he confess that he did such a horrible thing? A courtier named Madhav, who alone among the courtiers had seen the king's spittle fall on the minister, said with a view to win the king's favour, 'Oh, minister, forgive me, it was I who unwittingly spat on you.' The minister was wroth. But the king, who was inwardly immensely grateful to Madhav for saving him, appeased him saying, 'He has expressed his regret, and the whole thing happened by accident. Here, take a gold chain as the mark of my esteem

for you and forget the incident.' The minister was pleased, and kept quiet. 'For you,' said the king to Madhav, 'for having had the courage to own up in public an iniquitous act, here take this,' and he gave him a hundred gold coins. Vaman, another courtier and a rival of Madhav, was filled with envy, and resolved to win the same honour himself. So, the next day, when they all chewed again, he took the opportunity of the prime minister's coming to spit out the refuse which fell all over the body of that dignitary. The prime minister, white with rage, came into the royal presence, and asked angrily who had spat on him.

'Oh, prime minister, forgive me, it was I who unwittingly spat on you,' said Vaman expecting to be applauded and rewarded by the king. 'Take the wretch, give him thirty-six stripes, and never again allow him to enter our palace,' ordered the king who was terribly angry. The prime minister had the sentence of whipping executed at once. All the courtiers laughed to their hearts' content at Vaman's whipping. Poor Vaman cried out as he was being whipped. 'Sire, yesterday your majesty rewarded Madhav for speaking the truth, and to-day you punish me for doing the very thing you commended yesterday.'

For the same act one is rewarded and one punished. Is this justice?'

'Think deeper. Don't be carried away by appearances,' said the king and at once ordered Vaman to be thrust out of the palace.

LXXVI. WHY THE SAME RESULT?

TWO friends called Kandan and Andi had to walk a distance of thirty miles. Kandan refused to look at the mile and furlong stones lest he should get discouraged at his slow progress and the enormity of the distance to be covered yet. Andi walked looking at every mile and furlong stone. At first, Kandan was far in front. But both reached the destination at the same time.

'How did you reach here at the same time as myself?' asked Kandan, surprised at seeing Andi catch him up.

'Well,' said Andi, 'at first, I was dejected at the slow progress I was making and the great distance I had still to traverse. So, I was weighed with anxiety and lagged behind you. But after the fifteenth mile I said to myself, 'I have come more than half the distance. 'Only less than half remains. I became enthusiastic at the knowledge of having made so much progress and so walked much faster than you were doing.'

You had neither my early anxiety nor my later enthusiasm. Hence, what you gained in the first half I made up in the second.'

LXXVII. JOYS AND SORROWS

'WHY did God create joys and sorrows? The world would have been much better had there been no joys and no sorrows,' said a critic to a friend. 'Would you prefer an eternal cloudiness to day and night?' asked his friend.

'No; of course, not,' replied the critic. 'It will be miserable. The monotony will kill me.'

'Exactly so if there were no joys and no sorrows,' replied the friend.

LXXVIII. ECCENTRICITY IS ESSENTIAL

'ECCENTRICITY is essential for all men. It is the only alternative to madness or idiocy,' said a great psychologist. 'And, fortunately, every normal person has some little amount of eccentricity, just enough to save him from the terrible alternatives.'

'I have no eccentricity,' said a critic, 'I always do only what others do, I have nothing special about me.'

'Do you never have any odd habit you can call your own?' asked the psychologist.

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‘ Absolutely nil,’ replied the critic. ‘ I always do even the slightest of actions only after first finding out how others do it and then imitate them.’
‘ That itself is a great eccentricity,’ said the psychologist with a laugh.

LXXIX. HOW TO BE A POET

A MAN, who posed to be a great literary adviser, once broadcasted his three specifics for making any man a poet. ‘ *Look* a poet, *feel* a poet, *write* a poet,’ were his three specifics. ‘ A simpler advice can never be given,’ he said with the pride natural to a man like him.

‘ Of course, it can,’ said a wag, ‘ why three specifics? One specific, “ *Be* a poet ” is quite enough.’

LXXX. SHALL REMEMBER ALL MY LIFE

A FAMOUS memory training institution advertised widely that for a payment of thirty rupees it would undertake to improve the memory of any man so as to make him remember facts for his whole life-time. One man paid the thirty rupees, like so many others, and underwent the training.

‘ Do you think this training you have undergone will make you remember any fact all your life-time?’ asked a friend. ‘ Oh, yes,’ was the

reply. 'The fact of payment of the thirty rupees is likely to be remembered by me not only all my lifetime but even in my future births, for a more criminal waste of money can never be imagined.'

LXXXI. PROLONGING LIFE

'I SHALL make you live far longer than you would otherwise do,' said an Ayurvedic¹ doctor to a wealthy man of twenty-eight.

'How?' asked the rich man.

'I have got with me the famous medicine Jivamrita² by taking ten doses of which the span of life will be made considerably longer,' replied the doctor.

'Have you got this wonderful medicine with you now?' asked the man.

'Here it is,' said the doctor dangling a phial with ten pills in it.

'What is its price?' asked the rich man.

'One thousand rupees,' was the reply.

'What! one thousand rupees for ten small pills?' asked the man.

¹ Ayurveda—India's indigenous system of medicine.

² Literally, the nectar of life.

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‘ Yes, one thousand rupees and not a pie less,’ said the doctor. ‘ It contains gold, musk, skyroot and other valuable ingredients. Besides, it is not quantity that matters but quality. Even one day’s additional tenure in this joyous world is worth millions of pounds to a rich man. What is the use of telling you all about this? This medicine is meant for emperors and kings only.’

‘ I shall buy it,’ said the rich man stung to the quick at the tinge of sarcasm in the doctor’s words and possessed by a wild desire to take the medicine of emperors and kings and prolong his life. He paid the thousand rupees down and bought the medicine. He took the ten doses as directed. They tasted of ghee, honey and molasses, and had a faint odour of musk. After the ten doses were over, the rich man said to himself, ‘ Now my life will be longer than it otherwise would have been ! How fortunate that I came across the medicine ! ’

Two years later, while still only thirty, the rich man was on his death-bed. Calling the Ayurvedic doctor to his bed-side, he said :— ‘ You said that my life would be prolonged, and took from me Rs. 1,000. And here I am dying at the early age of thirty. You are a great scoundrel.’

‘ Oh, no,’ was the reply. ‘ It was because you took my medicine that you have lived even so long. Had you not taken it, you would have died far earlier.’

LXXXII. THE UNFAILING DEVICE

BRAHMIN priests in Malabar must bathe in tanks or rivers before officiating or even attending any religious ceremonies. Sometimes, ceremonies begin at 5 a.m., and in the rainy season to bathe before that hour in tanks or rivers is very trying. Padmanabha was a priest who never liked to have a cold plunge early in the morning. One day, in midwinter, he had to attend a ceremony at 5 a.m. It was bitter cold. So Padmanabha rubbed his body with a wet cloth instead of bathing by immersion, as required by the *sastras*, and, putting on his caste-mark, went to perform the ceremony. Some people had their suspicions about him and asked him whether he had bathed. ‘ I bathed ten minutes ago,’ said Padmanabha. They ran their fingers through his hair and found it bone dry. The lying priest was beaten and driven out, another priest being engaged. Some days later, Padmanabha had an engagement in another house. This time he took greater precautions. He sprinkled water on his hair

also and went to perform the ceremony. Again, some people suspected him and asked him whether he had bathed. 'Yes, see my hair,' said Padmanabha. Some urchins thrust their fingers under his hair and said, 'Look, the scalp is bone dry. The fellow has merely sprinkled water on his hair.' Padmanabha was again driven out ignominiously, and another priest engaged. Poor Padmanabha unburdened his soul of his woes to a bosom friend and said, 'What shall I do? Do what I will, I am found out. Is there any unfailing device which I can adopt?'

'Yes,' said the friend. 'Do the proper thing; then, you will never be found out.'

LXXXIII. THIRST SATISFIED

A TRAMP went to a sugar-cane plantation, cut six of the very best canes and chewed them all up. The indignant owner came to the spot just as the tramp had finished eating, and asked him, 'Why did you cut my sugar-canes and eat them?'

'Because I felt thirsty and wanted to satisfy my thirst,' replied the tramp.

'Are there no other ways of quenching your thirst?' asked the owner.

‘Yes, there are, of course but this is the pleasantest, and so I took to this,’ said the tramp. On this, the owner gave a staggering blow on the tramp’s cheek. ‘Why do you beat me?’ asked the tramp. ‘Because I felt angry and wanted to satisfy my outraged feelings,’ said the owner. ‘Are there no other ways of satisfying your outraged feelings?’ asked the tramp. ‘Yes, there are, of course, but this is the pleasantest; so I took to this,’ replied the owner.

LXXXIV. ALL-AT-ONCE AND NEVER-BEGIN

TWO men called All-At-Once and Never-Begin got from God two most precious seeds of the divine Kalpataru, the all-providing tree, after great penance. All-At-Once, in his eagerness to get the Kalpataru, planted his seed that very day, though it was in the middle of a parching summer. The seed, needless to say, was burnt up by the fierce heat, and never sprouted. Never-Begin was of opinion that such a precious seed should not be planted without the maximum care and caution. So he waited and waited. One year was too hot, the next too rainy, the next too windy, and so on and so forth. Meanwhile the precious Kalpataru seed became useless and incapable of sprouting by long keeping. Thus,

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one, by too great a haste, and the other, by too great a caution, lost for mankind an eternal benefit.

LXXXV. THE FASTEST CONVEYANCE

AN Indian squire with vast lands in different villages wanted to make his inspections swifter. So he asked a friend what the fastest conveyance available in the market was, and was told that it was a motor car. At once he bought a costly car and went rushing about the villages in it. The village roads were mere earthen ones and in an abominable state. Punctures occurred often, and, at last, the car was smashed and the squire seriously injured. His right leg had to be lacerated and he became permanently lame. 'Village roads require village conveyances, and the bullock cart is the fastest and safest under the present conditions,' said a friend to him after he had returned from the hospital. 'I know it now, having lost my leg,' was the pathetic reply.

LXXXVI. THE MAIN PROBLEM

'THE main problem in India is to raise the standard of life,' said a self-styled economist and ardent supporter of modern civilization.

‘Teach our people to use more things, their standard of life will be raised and we shall be equal to all other peoples.’ ‘What kind of things do you mean?’ asked a schoolmaster. ‘Chairs and tables, forks and knives, coats, hats and shoes and such other things,’ replied the economist. ‘What about the money required for buying these?’ asked the schoolmaster. ‘These fellows do not find money even for buying the coarsest food-stuffs and clothing for themselves and their families.’ ‘Oh, don’t worry about that,’ said the economist. ‘Money will be found easily. The main thing is to make these people use more things, want more things. Then they will naturally earn more.’ The schoolmaster kept quiet. All the people of a village were made to use chairs and tables, knives and forks, coats, trousers, hats and shoes by the enthusiastic economist who bought these articles and lent them to them. Within a month the economist was overjoyed to see the villagers take to these articles as fish to water. They became indispensable for them. But their earning capacity, instead of increasing, decreased. They wanted chairs and tables to be supplied to them while working for others, and, of course, the employers refused to do that. Washing the trousers, coats,

and socks cost a great deal. In the middle of the ploughing, these villagers wanted to sit on chairs. They were very anxious not to soil their trousers, coats and shoes, and so did not plough as vigorously as other villagers who had only their dirty loin-cloth and did not mind dirtying it. Gradually, the clientele of the economist earned less and less while their expenses had increased by leaps and bounds. They pawned the articles lent out to them, and, when the money thus borrowed had been spent, they took to robbery, burglary and stealing. Finally, the whole lot of them had to be sent to jail. There they felt very miserable at first owing to the absence of chairs and tables, knives and forks, trousers, coats and hats. But gradually they got used to do without them and when they came out of the jail were able to revert to their old standard of life before the economist had come with his new-fangled ideas. As for the economist, he had no desire to visit them again, owing to the loss of his chairs and tables, knives and forks, trousers, coats and hats. And even if he had been willing to pay a visit, which he was not, the landlords and the police and the very villagers themselves would have prevented his doing so after the mischief he had unwittingly done.

**LXXXVII. THE PAST, THE PRESENT AND
THE FUTURE**

AN Indian, an Englishman and a Negro were taking tea together in a London tea-shop. In the course of conversation, a discussion arose as to whether the past, the present or the future deserved to be thought about most.

‘I vote for the past,’ said the Indian, ‘for my country’s past was glorious while the present is inglorious and the future uncertain. So I love to think about the past most.’ ‘I vote for the present,’ said the Englishman, ‘for my country’s past was obscure, while the present is most glorious and the future uncertain. So I love to think about the present most.’ ‘I vote for the future,’ said the Negro, ‘for my race’s past was barbarous and its present inglorious. Our hope is in the future. So I love to think about the future most.’

LXXXVIII. THE FIRE-FLY AND FIRE

A MAN in a forest was kindling a fire by means of flints. As soon as the sparks came, a jealous fire-fly near by used to pour water on them and extinguish them. Still, the man persisted in producing sparks by striking flints. ‘Why, oh man, are you laboriously making these artificial

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sparks while I, a living spark, am here?' asked the fire-fly at last. 'Because,' said the man, 'I want the real thing which I cannot get from you, you silly pretender. I want heat and light which you cannot give, your heat and light being hardly sufficient for yourself. So keep quiet, you fool, while I kindle the fire again.' The poor fire-fly slunk away in shame.

LXXXIX. M.A., NOT M.M.

A YOUNG man of twenty passed his M.A. examination and returned home after taking his degree. Everybody praised him and thought him a wonderful man. One day, his father had to go to a distant place on business, and, there being no other males in the house, asked his son to sleep in the verandah during the night. 'Thieves may try to take advantage of my absence,' said the father, 'and there are plenty of jewels and cash in the house. Besides, there are your mother and four sisters, and you know how brave women are. So, be careful.' That night, the M.A. had little sleep. He was lying down in the verandah and constantly thinking of thieves and shuddering. Once, he heard a noise, and, concluding it to be that of thieves, he pulled his blanket over his head and pretended to be fast asleep. But the

noise turned out to have been really made by a cat, and the night passed off without any worse consequences than sleeplessness and continuous fear. When his father returned in the morning, he told him all about the happenings of the night.

‘Why did you pull your blanket over your face?’ asked the father. ‘So that the thieves might take me to be fast asleep and not beat me or otherwise molest me,’ said the son.

‘A good protector I left behind!’ said the father. ‘Fancy an M.A. like you doing that!’ added he in wonder. ‘Where is the wonder, father?’ asked the M.A. ‘I am only an M.A. and not an M.M., a master of arts and not a master of myself.’

XC. HIS WORST ENEMY

A WICKED Hindu used to go daily to a Siva temple and pray, ‘Oh God, thrust thy trident¹ deep into the necks of my enemies.’ Nothing happened for a long time. One day, he stood alone face to face with the idol and said, ‘Oh God, why do you not heed my prayer? So many days have I prayed in vain. Now at least be pleased to grant my prayer.’ Suddenly, he saw the divine

¹ The divine weapon of Siva ; a three-headed spear.

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trident directed at his own neck and scarcely three inches from it. 'Oh God, I wanted the necks of my enemies to be pierced and not mine,' said he horrified. 'You are the worst enemy you have got,' said God, 'and I must begin with you if your prayer is to be granted. By your bad deeds, worse words and even worse thoughts you have far surpassed all other enemies of yours in the capacity to injure yourself.' The man at once withdrew his prayer and saved himself.

XCI. WHY A CROCODILE'S SKIN IS THICK
'WHY is your skin so thick, oh crocodile?' asked a man of a crocodile. 'God made it thick in order that I may not commit suicide or die of vexation at hearing other people's unkind remarks,' replied the crocodile. 'If I rise to breathe, sinister motives are attributed to me. Even my tears are heartlessly calumnized. But for our thick skins, our race would have been extinct long ago.'

'I am also calumnized,' said the man, 'and yet God has not given me a thick skin. Why is it?'

'Because,' said the crocodile, 'you have the gift of speech, can calumnize others, and do calumnize them. To make you feel the sting of

calumnies so that you may not abuse your gift of speech and horribly calumnise others, God has given you a thin skin.'

XCII. A DEVIL EATING FOOD-STUFFS

THERE was a temple in a country village in Malabar. It was dedicated to a devil which had the reputation of eating all food-stuffs offered to it by its devotees. Countless plantains and jugs of milk were thus being daily consumed by the devil at nights. The offerings would be placed before it in the evening, and would wholly disappear before morning. This fact gave the temple great celebrity, and votaries flocked to it from far and wide. No doubt, none had actually seen the devil eating the food-stuffs, but the fact of their disappearance, combined with the solemn confirmation of the devil's eating by the priest Neelakantan, ought to have satisfied even the most fastidious court of law. It did satisfy all the country-folk with the sole exception of one mischief-monger called Madhu who held to the heretical blasphemy that it was Neelakantan who was eating all the food-stuffs and not the devil. But, then, Madhu was and always had been an enemy of Neelakantan. People whispered that the reason was that Madhu did not approve of

devil-worship and so had taken to spreading this scandal in order to discredit the devil. So they disbelieved Madhu's theory and laughed at him openly. This was too much for the hyper-sensitive Madhu. He determined to prove his theory.

One day, late in the night, when the temple was about to be closed, Madhu took four tempting plantain fruits and some fine sugar as an offering to the devil. He placed these in the unholy of unholies (the inner temple where the devil's idol was) in the presence of the whole village. Then the doors were locked as usual. Neelakantan would open the temple next morning at five, and the fruits would have disappeared. The public were allowed into the temple only at six as the priest alone could remain in the temple between five and six when the great mysteries were gone through.

The next morning, Madhu went with several others at 4.45 a.m. to bathe in the tank attached to the devil's temple. He was in very high spirits. His friends could not guess the reason for this since he was usually gloomy and morose when he was in the precincts of the devil shrine. His companions attributed the change to his conversion to the devil's faith; for, had he not

the previous night offered for the first time in his life four gorgeous plantain fruits and excellent powdered sugar to the devil? The truth was that Madhu had deftly put some powder of the naikarne fruit¹ into the plantain fruits and the sugar, and was merrily contemplating its would-be results. By the time the party got into the water to bathe, Neelakantan had opened the temple and had gone in. 'The sacred mysteries will begin presently,' said Madhu to his friends. Five minutes after this, piercing shrieks were heard from the temple, and all the bathers, including Madhu, rushed semi-naked into the temple. When they entered it, they saw Neelakantan making horrible guttural sounds and scratching his tongue as if he would pull it out. One plantain fruit and some sugar had been spat out by him, and three other plantain fruits were by his side on a plate. Madhu laughed outrageously, and explained the incident to the others who soon joined him in the merriment. 'See the devil eating the food-stuffs,' said Madhu laughing, 'and the sacred mysteries!' 'You wretch,' said Neelakantan, 'you are worse than the devil.'

¹ A fruit common in Malabar; it is covered with a powder which causes the most horrible scratching sensation.

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‘Of course, I am,’ said Madhu, ‘for I trapped it.’ Madhu rushed out and invited the whole village to come to the temple to see the devil eating food-stuffs. Men, women and children rushed to the temple and saw the pathetic figure of Neelakantan savagely scratching his palate and tongue and with the spat-out banana and sugar near him and the uneaten three bananas by his side on a plate. ‘Oh God, why did I become the devil’s priest?’ asked Neelakantan, in agony.

‘To eat the devil’s food-stuffs,’ said Madhu amidst howls of laughter.

XCIII. THE DISINTERESTED WITNESS

AN oil-monger was going along a road with a pot of oil on his head. A Brahmin met him and asked him what the price of oil per pot was. ‘Nine rupees,’ said the oil-monger. ‘Will you give it for five rupees?’ asked the Brahmin. The oil-monger was indignant. ‘Even if it is sold for three rupees, you won’t be in a position to buy it, so why enquire about the prices?’ said he. The Brahmin was wroth at the insult and overturned the pot of oil. The pot fell and broke into a hundred pieces spilling all the oil. The Brahmin ran away. The oil-monger resolved to go to a criminal court to file a complaint. None

had witnessed the offence except himself and the offender, but no court would convict without a corroborating witness. Just then, Achyuthan came along and offered to bear witness to the whole incident for a consideration of five rupees to be paid after the conviction was secured. The oil-monger filed a complaint of assault and mischief before a magistrate and narrated the incident faithfully except as regards his insult to the Brahmin. His version was that the Brahmin asked for the oil for five rupees and when he refused to sell it for that sum the accused got enraged and upset the pot saying, ' You low-caste oil-mongers have become most avaricious of late. You would not part with the oil for five rupees. I shall make you part with it for nothing.' The oil-monger added that the Brahmin, in addition to breaking his pot and spilling the oil, belaboured him and would have killed him but for the intervention of Achyuthan who had watched all the previous incidents with equanimity except for an occasional protest but now actively interfered on his behalf and saved him. Achyuthan corroborated the oil-monger in every detail, and stood the cross-examination better than the Himalaya does the storm. When the accused alleged that he never witnessed anything as alleged, Achyuthan simply

asked him, ' I am not your enemy, why should I depose falsely against you ? ' The accused had to admit that Achyuthan was not an enemy ; this convinced the magistrate that Achyuthan was a disinterested witness and that the accused was guilty. The oil-monger, of course, had averred that Achyuthan was the most veracious man born. The assertion of the accused Brahmin that he was not in the village on the date of the offence and that Achyuthan was giving false evidence for the sake of five rupees left the magistrate cold especially as no witnesses were cited to prove these facts. He convicted the Brahmin of the offences alleged against him, and fined him twenty-five rupees, ordering the whole amount to be paid to the oil-monger as compensation for his loss, trouble and injuries. The Brahmin paid the fine then and there, and left the court. Achyuthan and the oil-monger also left the court. All three were returning to their village. Achyuthan asked the oil-monger for the five rupees promised to him. The oil-monger, having achieved his purpose, was in no mood to give five rupees to Achyuthan and told him so. But Achyuthan was too clever to put up with this cheating. He ran up to the Brahmin, who was walking in front, and offered for a consideration

of ten rupees to give evidence in court that the oil-monger had on the return journey beaten him saying, 'Oh, wretched Brahmin, the court has made good my loss in money. Now, let me return the blows you gave me.' The Brahmin was glad to have an opportunity of taking revenge on his enemy. He gave the ten rupees. Achyuthan gave him some blows in order to create some marks of violence, and both returned to the court. The Brahmin filed a complaint of 'assault and insult' and cited Achyuthan as a witness. The oil-monger was sent for by the magistrate, and the trial proceeded. The Brahmin repeated the story taught to him, and it appeared to be quite probable and in entire consonance with human nature to the learned magistrate. Then Achyuthan got into the box and in his own inimitable and straightforward way gave his evidence which was not shaken in the least by cross-examination. When the oil-monger said that the whole thing was a concoction and that he was a liar, Achyuthan said, 'This morning, I was the most veracious man on earth. How did I suddenly become a liar? Because I speak the truth always and did not side with you even though you offered me twenty-five rupees if I would depose that nothing happened?'

Your Honour, I prize truth above friendship or money. Neither the oil-monger nor the Brahmin is my enemy, and, yet, it has been my painful duty to depose against them both, for Truth must prevail.'

The magistrate was impressed. He convicted the oil-monger of the offences alleged against him, fined him twenty-five rupees, gave the whole sum as compensation to the Brahmin for his injuries, labelled Achyuthan in his judgment as 'a singular example of a disinterested witness' and ended with a pious hope that his tribe might increase.

XCIV. DEATH AND LIFE

'DEATH and life are both indifferent to me,' said a sage to a general who was camping in the neighbourhood. 'Then, why don't you die?' asked the irate general who thought that life was distinctly better than death and was annoyed at what he considered the hypocritical opinion of the sage. 'Because,' said the sage, 'they are both indifferent to me. Why should I seek death when I know that it is no better than life, and why should I seek life when I know that it is no better than death?' The general was beaten, and, when he went back to the capital, he told the king

about the incident and added that it was his firm opinion that the sage was a hypocrite in having said what he did. 'He knew that death was not in sight, and, so, glibly indulged in those views. Were he a soldier who has to constantly face death, he would not have said so. Of course, I was clean beaten by his quibble,' said the general. 'Well,' said the king after a minute's thought, 'we shall soon find out whether he is a hypocrite or not.' He ordered that his tents should be pitched half a mile from where the sage was, and directed that his fiercest lion be let loose in the forest where the sage was doing penance. Then he went to his camp with the keeper of the lion and the general and awaited further developments. The lion, in its new-found liberty, scoured the forest with terrible roars making the whole forest resound with them. The sage was panic-stricken at this unexpected appearance of a lion in his forest, and ran for all he was worth to the king's camp. Trembling like an aspen leaf, he prostrated before the king and said, 'Oh king, a lion has invaded my forest, and my life is in danger. Kings are in this ancient land bound to protect the sages.' The king laughed, called the general, and said to the sage 'Oh, holy man, I would have taken steps earlier to protect the

forest but for this general who told me that you had emphatically assured him that death and life were both indifferent to you. Now I find that you love life far better than death, in fact, far more than a sage should do. So I shall order my keeper to withdraw his lion from your forest.' The king, the general, the keeper and the courtiers split their sides with laughter, and the sage sneaked away.

XCV. A SNAKE-CHARMER'S REVENGE

THERE was a celebrated snake-charmer in Malabar who undertook to catch any venomous snake provided its approximate length and description were given. He used to charge four annas per venomous snake caught if the specified snake were among those caught, and four annas alone if it were not among those.

Ram Narain was very much troubled by seeing a five-foot cobra disappear into a hole in his house one day. He wanted to get this removed with the least delay lest his wife, his dear children and, above all, himself should be bitten to death. But he was not willing to pay more than four annas for this. And yet the snake-charmer above-mentioned was sure to bring out more snakes and fleece him of at least a rupee. Ram Narain

thought deeply and at last hit upon a working plan. He went to the snake-charmer and told him that a cobra six feet long was in his house. The snake charmer came and began his operations. The strange music soon attracted two deadly Russell vipers and three cobras including the five-foot cobra which came from the identical hole in which Ram Narain had seen it disappear. His eyes glistened as he saw it. The snake-charmer asked him whether that was the cobra he had mentioned. 'No,' said Ram Narain falsely, in order not to be mulcted of more than four annas. The two other cobras were only 4 feet long. The snake-charmer pulled off the poison fangs of all the snakes. Then he put them into a basket, and played more vigorously, but no more cobra came. 'It is getting late. You can go now. Here is your four anna piece,' said Ram Narain. 'What,' said the snake-charmer, 'I have never yet failed in catching the snake indicated. I shall try once more.' With this, he put all his energies into the pipe and played. The shrill weird music penetrated throughout the surrounding area and some harmless rat snakes came running, but no more cobra. The snake-charmer understood the trick, took the four annas, and departed. As he went, he told Ram Narain, 'To-morrow, at 6 p.m.,

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you will find two six-foot cobras in your house as a punishment for your having uttered a lie to-day. The cobras are sacred snakes and know how to take revenge on liars.' Ram Narain feared the cobras not because they were sacred but because they were venomous. He pooh-poohed the idea of their coming to his house to take revenge for his having told a lie. He had never heard that cobras were the enemies of lies, much less the vindicators of truth. So he slept in peace, and went about his business next day quite oblivious of even the threat. But, when he returned home at 6 p.m., he found the house in an uproar. His wife and children were shrieking for help. He asked them what the matter was, and ascertained that two six-foot cobras had invaded the house and forced its inmates to take refuge in an upstairs room behind bolted doors. His wife and children were screaming and shrieking through a window. Ram Narain was thunderstruck. So, the sacred cobras were, after all, the vindicators of truth! He had no desire to venture into a house invaded by two six-foot cobras. He ran to the snake-charmer, fell at his feet, gave him five rupees, and asked him to take away the snakes. That worthy was mollified a bit by this abject submission and the gift of five rupees, and went to Ram Narain's

house, played his weird music, attracted in an instant the two cobras, and put them into his basket. The wife and children came out and implored Ram Narain not to utter any more lies to snake-charmers in future. Ram Narain promised accordingly. Then he accompanied the snake-charmer to the gate not so much to honour him as to make sure that the snakes were outside the gate. At the gate they met Lakshminarain who was a bosom friend of Ram Narain and a bit of a philosopher. He asked what the matter was, and Ram Narain explained everything with tears in his eyes. Meanwhile, the snake-charmer took a hurried leave and was going away. Lakshminarain stopped him and said, 'None of your humbugging with me. I am not a fool like Ram Narain. Unless you pay back the five rupees and promise never more to do mischief like this, I shall hand you over to the police for letting cobras loose into houses with a view to blackmailing the inmates.'

'They are real wild cobras and not tame ones,' said the snake-charmer. 'Let us see their poison fangs,' said Lakshminarain and opened the basket and examined the cobras. Both were without their poison fangs. The snake-charmer was terror-stricken and begged for pardon. He returned

the five rupees to the astonished Ram Narain and went away muttering to himself, 'A philosopher is worse than a cart-load of cobras. I can charm them but not him.'

XCVI. NARADA¹ AND THE SUN AND THE MOON

The sun and the moon had a dispute one day as to which of them was greater and more useful to the world. Naturally, as in all such disputes between two people, they could not come to any agreement. So, they went to the divine sage Narada, whose wisdom and tact were famous even in Heaven, and asked him to give his verdict. 'The sun is greater during the day and the moon during the night,' said Narada. The sun was more or less satisfied, but not so the moon which was cocksure of success if a definite verdict were given. 'Don't equivocate. Tell us definitely as to who is greater at all times,' said the moon to Narada. 'Don't press me, it is not good for you,' said Narada. But the moon would not listen. 'It is best to know the truth once for all,' said the moon. 'Be it so,' said Narada. 'Then, I shall ask you alternately to go

¹ A divine sage.

into hiding for one day so that I may judge which of you is greater and more useful to the world.' 'Alright,' said the moon, delighted and sure of success, and went into hiding first on full moon day in order to make its success doubly sure. The world had only the sun's light that day. All people missed the usual brilliant moonlight and cursed the sun for the stupid quarrel which had caused them this loss. The moon was delighted. It told Narada, 'Do you hear those curses? Is there any doubt in your mind now as to who is greater?' 'Wait till to-morrow is also over,' said the sage. Next day, the sun hid, and the world was plunged in darkness during the day. All work was at a standstill. People cursed the wretched moon for its silly quarrel with the sun and said, 'Now, we shall have to work in the night with the aid of the moon-light which is a very poor substitute for sunlight.' But night came, and there was no moonlight even though the moon was right over-head. There was pitch darkness everywhere. The moon went and asked Narada, 'Why is there no light in me, oh sage?'

'Because,' said Narada smiling, 'Yours was a reflected light borrowed from the sun. The sun being now in hiding, you cannot shine in

borrowed splendour.' The moon hung down its head in shame and said, 'I accept your former verdict and unreservedly withdraw my ill-advised prayer for an absolute verdict.'

XCVII. QUANTITY *VERSUS* QUALITY

A DEMAGOGUE of most mediocre brains used to declare that quantity would make up for lack of quality. 'Twenty second-rate mangoes are, any day, worth more than two first-rate mangoes. The opinions of five thousand common people of average brains are certainly worth more than the opinions of five experts. I tell you, quality can always be made up for by quantity,' said he.

'Stuff and nonsense!' said a fisherman, who was among the audience, 'Can the whole salt water in the ocean equal a jug of fresh water to a thirsty man even though there are trillions and trillions of jugs of water in the ocean?'

XCVIII. BUDDHA'S REPLY

THE great world teacher Buddha was once attacked for his having said, 'I don't know whether God exists or not.' The critic was a Brahmin, and he asked Buddha, 'Oh, thou who pretendeth to be enlightened and to be a great world teacher, is it befitting thy wisdom and enlightenment to say that thou dost not know

whether God exists? Is ignorance too a sign of enlightenment?’

‘Ignorance is not a sign of enlightenment,’ replied Buddha, ‘but confession of ignorance is. A religious teacher ought, above all, to speak the truth. I cannot say that God exists, having never seen Him though I have watched for Him diligently, and I cannot say that He does not exist, being unable to assert that I have scanned every corner of all the countless universes. So, I have been forced to say, albeit with the greatest pain, that I do not know whether God exists or not. It is far easier and far more conducive to my prestige to say that God exists or that He does not exist. It is painful for a religious teacher to be unable to give a definite opinion either way. But everything else must be subordinated to Truth. That is why our ancients say that God is Truth, meaning thereby that Truth must prevail over everything else. Where is, then, the shame in my having spoken the truth about God?’

XCIX. A PRINCESS'S CHOICE

KUMARADEVI, the beautiful daughter of the Lichchhavis¹ announced her intention to select

¹ A powerful tribe having its centre at Vaisali.

a husband for herself. All the princes, nobles and rich men of India flocked to Vaisali in order not to miss a chance of winning the handsomest and the most accomplished princess of the age. All the suitors were treated to a sumptuous feast by the Lichchhavis. Kumaradevi asked them one by one what their qualifications to sit at the feast were. Some said that they were kings, others that they were princes, others that they were big merchants, others that they were mighty generals, others that they were statesmen, and others that they were famous scholars. When she put the question to the young prince Chandragupta, he replied, ' I am hungry, and that is the best qualification for sitting at a feast.' Kumara-devi was pleased with the reply, but wanted to put one question more. She asked all the suitors how they would treat her if she married them. One said, ' As my goddess ' ; another said, ' As the lady of my heart and kingdom ' ; another said ' I shall be your slave ' ; she asked Chandragupta, and he said, ' I shall treat you as my wedded wife and helpmate in all my duties. I shall not be your slave or expect you to be mine. We shall both retain our free minds uncurbed, and shall, by frank discussion and mutual consultation, advance our welfare and that of our progeny and

subjects.' 'You are indeed the husband meant for me,' said Kumaradevi putting the marriage garland round his neck.

C. HEMU'S REPLY

WHEN the great Hindu trader-soldier Hemu wanted to become a king and crown himself at Delhi, a great pandit, whom he requested to officiate at the ceremony, asked him, 'How, oh Hemu, can a shop-keeper like you aspire to be a king and to succeed as a king?' 'Why not?' asked Hemu in return, 'how is a shop-keeper less fitted to be a king than the robbers and murderers who fill so many thrones? A king is the account-keeper of his people, or should be, and I, having been a trader myself, can render accounts to them better than the unlettered robber and murderer monarchs. Moreover, nothing can be done without finance, and the cardinal principle of finance is to balance income and expenditure, a thing easier for a merchant like me to do than for others. A shop-keeper will, any day, make a better king than a robber or soldier or murderer, for, though he may cheat, he will never entirely rob or kill.'

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CI. ABSOLUTE EQUALITY AND PROPORTIONATE EQUALITY

THERE lived a pandit once who was a fanatical advocate of absolute equality. 'No special privileges to anybody, the same treatment to one and all,' were his mottoes which he trotted out on all possible occasions. One day, the king held a great assembly of the learned men and asked the pandit to expound his theory. The pandit rose and said :—' All human beings were created by God, and, so, are entitled to the same treatment. If circumstances like poverty, ignorance and bad upbringing have made some men more vicious than others, they ought not to be penalized for their vices by differential treatment, for that would be first doing them an injustice by denying them certain amenities and then punishing them for the natural result of the lack of those very amenities denied to them. So I say, treat all absolutely alike, whether they are rich or poor, learned or ignorant, saints or sinners.'

'No,' said another pandit, 'that would be absurd. To treat a saint and sinner alike will be doing the greatest injustice to the saint. To give a man of thirty the same quantity of food as to a child of one will be grossly unjust to the man and will kill him. To punish a child of one for

kicking you as you would punish a man of thirty will be doing the greatest injustice to the child. Absolute equality, in short, will lead to monstrous injustice. God himself never made men absolutely equal, physically, mentally or morally. Nor did He make their fingers absolutely equal. Even this assembly is only of learned men and not of all kinds of men, thus breaking the principle of absolute equality. If absolute equality were to prevail simply because God created all, a dog should be given a seat the same as a pandit, a snake fondled the same as a child, a tiger shaken hands with, and a lion invited to dinner. All these we never do, never shall do, and never ought to do. Absolute equality is neither just, nor natural, nor even expedient. What we want is proportionate equality and not absolute equality.'

CII. THE CUNNING BORROWER

IN an inland country village, there lived a man called Appadurai who used to borrow small sums from people promising to return them on a certain date and keeping his promise to the very letter. This inhuman punctuality was very strange in an Indian village and attracted notice. The effect of it was, however, that Appadurai was readily given

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hand loans of moderate amounts without interest for short periods. The sums he borrowed gradually became larger and larger, but the same strict punctuality was observed. One day, Appadurai wanted to borrow a hundred rupees from a big man of the village called Sivaram promising to return the amount at 7 a.m. five days later. Sivaram's curiosity was roused. He knew that Appadurai had no lands or ostensible occupation. There could be no need for him to borrow a hundred rupees, and, in any case, there would be hardly time for him to get another hundred rupees and return them within five days. Appadurai never lent to any man, that was well known. Nor did he ever borrow from another when one loan was pending with him. So the mystery became deeper. Sivaram had a shrewd suspicion that Appadurai was returning the same money with the object of finally borrowing large sums one day from everybody, who would be led away by his general reputation for honesty, punctuality and fixed principles, and running away with them to a distant place. Appadurai's lack of land or house or wife or cash or other valuables only deepened this suspicion. So Sivaram took ten ten-rupee currency notes, noted down their numbers carefully in his diary,



and then brought them and gave them to Appadurai who blurted out profuse thanks. 'You want the money urgently, I suppose?' said Sivaram.

'Yes, I have to spend it this very day,' said Appadurai, 'but I shall certainly return it to you on the promised date.' Then Appadurai went away to some unknown place. Five days later, at precisely seven in the morning, Appadurai turned up at Sivaram's house to return the money. 'When did you return to the village?' asked Sivaram. 'This morning at 5 a.m.,' said Appadurai.

'Did you have occasion to spend the money?' asked Sivaram.

'Of course,' said Appadurai, 'I spent it the very day I borrowed from you. Else, do you think I would have borrowed it? I had great difficulty in scraping together the amount for returning to you. But, a promise is a promise, and I have never broken one yet. I managed to scrape together the amount somehow. Here it is,' and Appadurai produced ten currency notes for ten rupees each.

'Wait a minute,' said Sivaram, and took his diary. He took the currency notes and compared the numbers. They tallied exactly.

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‘Scoundrel,’ said Sivaram to Appadurai, ‘your villainous schemes are cut short prematurely. Are these not the same notes I gave you? Don’t dare to contradict me, for I have got the numbers here. I shall tell all other villagers about this. Oh, what a pit you were preparing for us all!’

Appadurai sneaked away from Sivaram’s house, and, that very day, left the village for good.

CIII. MUSICIAN, SHUT THE GATE

THERE was a musician whose songs were more effective in scaring away crowds than machine guns. Unfortunately, no king used him for dispersing mobs, the function for which he was so eminently fitted by nature, and, so, he continued to be a terror to all honest men. He tried to attract crowds, and, in this anomalous job, succeeded no more than a gunshot succeeds in attracting birds. Those unfortunates whom he surprised with his songs took to their heels the moment their ears were bombarded, and it is said on credible authority that one fat gentleman burst his lungs when running away from one of these concerts and in his dying declaration prayed that his death might be treated either as murder by poison poured into the ear, or as suicide while of sound mind. On another occasion, during

one of these stampedes, a lady was trampled upon. The musician and others rushed to the spot and raised her. They asked her how she felt. 'Oh,' she said to the musician, 'your stopping that music has more than compensated for the pain I suffered by the trampling' and took to her heels before the malady could assail her ears again. It is even said, though on what authority I cannot recollect now, that the Government of India contemplated passing a special law declaring this musician's music to be a nuisance and an assault and battery. Why, a certain High Court Judge wanted to issue a perpetual injunction against his singing, and the order was complete except for the signature. Just then, the musician heard of it and went to the court and prayed to be heard. The judge reluctantly agreed. 'Hear me sing, and, then, see whether an injunction is necessary,' said the musician and began to give a sample of his singing. The poor High Court Judge went mad and never recovered. The injunction order was therefore left unsigned. No other judge wanted to risk the same fate. So the musician was left unmuzzled.

But, try how he will, nobody would listen to his music, no, not even his wife. Why, the lady declared that since a divorce was unknown to

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Hindu Law she would commit suicide, the only remedy left to an ill-treated Hindu wife, if subjected to this torture. The musician hated suicides, and, so, never again troubled her. But he had a great ambition to sing. So, when his son's marriage was arranged, he waived all claim to any dowry provided he was allowed to sing in the marriage pandal on the first night. The bride's father mournfully agreed as he did not want to lose a desirable bridegroom going so cheap. He got his ears carefully stuffed with wax and sat in the pandal. The people assembled had not been informed about the musical arrangements. They thought that the musician was present only in his capacity as the father of the bridegroom and so were peacefully chewing betel. Soon, however, they were disillusioned. The musician began to sing, and a wild stampede followed. Screams and shrieks, cries and groans, reverberated in the pandal for ten minutes, and, then, the whole audience had left except the bride's father who, out of politeness and fear, and fortified by his wax, sat for some time as if listening to the music. The musician was enchanted, for this was the first time for many years that he had got anybody to listen to his music at all. After a quarter of an hour, the

bride's father found the situation hopeless. Either the dreadful noise was penetrating through the wax, or the ears were not the only organs communicating with the auditory nerves. He felt that in five more minutes he would either go mad or commit suicide or murder the musician. He thought for a moment of this last alternative. Why not murder the fellow and rid the world of this pestiferous man who was worse than any epidemic? It would be an act of the purest patriotism and the highest public spirit. But the marriage would be disturbed. So, he chose the less heroic method of beating a hasty retreat. 'Look here, musician,' said he, 'there is paddy stored in the house. So, when you finish your music and go, please shut the gate carefully' and walked out.

CIV. THE BULLOCKS WHICH DREW THE TRAIN

WHEN the railway was first introduced into Travancore, it was a great wonder to the country rustics who flocked to the stations and gazed open-mouthed at the trains. In those unsophisticated days, a country rustic was found at a terminus walking up and down the platform looking inquisitively and rather wonderingly at a

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train which had just arrived. The station-master at first thought that it was the mere curiosity of a rustic who sees a train for the first time, but was rather puzzled when the man went on looking for something he could not see. So he went up to him and asked, 'What are you looking for, my man?' 'For the bullocks which drew the train. Where are they?' was the reply.

CV. MAKE MY NAME GOOD

THERE was a landlord who became thoroughly unpopular in the country parts owing to his atrocious dealings in grain with the poor people. Whenever the tenants had to give him grain, he used a measure which was $\frac{1}{8}$ th of the correct measure and whenever he had to give grain to his tenants, farm labourers, or buyers, he used a measure which was only $\frac{7}{8}$ ths of the correct measure. All feared the tyrant too much to think of protesting to him openly. Besides, the times were so hard that even this tyrant could find enough tenants and coolies to replace the existing ones. But he was hated by one and all, and had a most evil reputation. 'There never was a man so evil as he, and there never will be,' was the common saying. At last, the tyrant was

on his death-bed, for even the worst of men must die one day, and those were days when rejuvenation was unheard of. He called his only son to his bedside, and said, 'Son, for your sake I have sinned and earned a most evil reputation. I am leaving you a hundred thousand rupees. In return, I have only one request to make, and that is to make my name good and to make people regret my death.' The son solemnly promised to make his father's name good, and the old tyrant expired with a satisfied smile on his lips.

All people rejoiced at the tyrant's death, 'The wretch that darkened this countryside so long,' said they, 'is no more. Praise be to God!' But they praised God too soon. The son began to use a measure $1\frac{1}{4}$ times the correct measure when receiving grain from his tenants and a measure $\frac{3}{4}$ of the correct measure when giving out grain to his tenants, coolies and buyers. The whole countryside groaned under this new oppression as it had never groaned before. 'The old man was much better. It is our misfortune that he died leaving this devil behind. Would to God he were living now!' said one and all. Thus the death-bed promise was religiously fulfilled, and a spiritual joy shone out of the son's eyes.

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CVI. EXPECTED TO STEAL

SEVERAL servants on a salary of two annas six pies per month were being employed in the palace of an Indian prince some years ago. There was keen competition for all these jobs, and everyone of these servants was either born a thief or achieved thieftdom or had thieftdom thrust on him. Once, one of these servants, who was not on good terms with the palace sentry owing to his not having paid him the customary presents, was caught red-handed with several stolen food-stuffs and other articles. He was straightway hailed before a magistrate. After hearing the prosecution evidence, the magistrate took down the statement of the accused. Therein, he stated that his pay was two annas six pies per month. 'Is that correct?' asked the astonished magistrate of the Prosecuting Inspector of Police.

'Yes, your honour,' replied that worthy. 'I discharge the accused,' said the magistrate, 'for his salary shows that he is expected to steal, and, in stealing these things, he only fulfilled those expectations.'

CVII. LILAVATHI'S CORROBORATION.

LILAVATHI, the celebrated lady mathematician of ancient India, was with her father, the even more famous mathematician Bhāskaracharya, attending

the court of a local king. She was then only a girl of ten, but so great was her reputation for commonsense and learning that the king and his ministers used to listen to her words with as much respect as to those of learned pandits. One day, a great noble told the King and the courtiers about a battle in the adjacent kingdom in which one hundred thousand soldiers had been engaged on either side, and all had died, each man in one army having chosen an opponent from the hostile army and having killed him, being himself killed by him in the process of killing him. This was too big a dose to be swallowed even by an Indian court. 'Really?' said the king. 'Your Majesty, I have uttered the simple truth. I saw the whole occurrence with my own eyes,' said the noble. The king kept silent out of politeness, but characterized the story as 'passing strange.' He asked every one of his ministers and courtiers whether he believed that such an incident could have taken place. All, including Bhaskaracharya, professed unbelief in the story. Then the King asked Lilavathi whether she believed it to be true. 'I know it to be true,' said she to the great wonder and joy of the noble, 'because a soldier told me that, close to the place where the two hundred thousand dead bodies lay, two cobras of

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equal length, girth and strength began to swallow one another at the same time, each beginning with the other's tail, and finally swallowed one another and completely disappeared leaving no trace behind.' The king and the courtiers laughed loudly at this. The noble was furious and said ' That tale about the cobras was a lie. How can two cobras of equal length, girth and strength swallow one another? At a certain point the swallowing must stop. Unless one were a bigger cobra, it could never have swallowed the other. In any case, both could not have disappeared. Matter is permanent. Whoever would believe such a silly story? ' ' Those who believe your other silly story,' said Lilavathi amidst roars of laughter.

CVIII. WHY HE READ ALL NEWSPAPERS

A. SCHOOL-MASTER was found to be borrowing and reading all newspapers irrespective of their parties, political complexions and social predilections. All people admired him for his catholic outlook and wide tolerance, and none more than a philosopher. One day, the philosopher said to the school-master, ' I want to express my heart-felt admiration for your catholicity of outlook, broad sympathies, true tolerance, and open mind

as evidenced by your reading all the newspapers irrespective of their parties, political complexions or social predilections.'

'Pooh!' said the school-master, 'do you know why I read all the newspapers?' 'Why? To broaden your mind, I suppose?' said the philosopher, puzzled. 'Nothing of the sort,' replied the school-master, 'merely to scan the "wanted" columns in order to see whether anybody wants me at a higher salary than I am getting now.'

CIX. RAIN AND THUNDER

TWO people were sleeping, one on the upper berth and one on the lower, on a night of tremendous rain and thunder, the monsoon having just broken out in all its fury. At midnight, the man on the upper berth woke up and wanted to play a practical joke on the other. He took a pail of water, poured it over the sleeper below, and hid the pail at once. The man thus treated woke up at once shivering with cold, and asked the other angrily why he had poured water on him. The other replied laughing, 'It was not I who poured the water, but the rain. Don't you know that the monsoon has just broken out in all its fury?' The man on the lower berth said nothing and went to sleep again and

was soon fast asleep. His comrade laughed to himself at the folly of the other man who could believe that the monsoon rains would drench him without drenching the man on the upper berth. 'He was always a fool and will be,' said he to himself, and, congratulating himself on his superior wisdom, went again to sleep and was soon fast asleep. An hour later, he woke up in intense pain due to several blows being administered to him. When he opened his eyes, he saw his comrade retreating to the lower berth. 'Why the devil did you beat me?' asked the upper berth man of the other. 'It was not I who beat you, but the thunder. Don't you know that the monsoon has just broken out in all its fury?' was the laughing reply.

CX. THE AMEN PRIEST

AT important Brahminical ceremonies, there is generally one priest who repeats the *mantras* or prayers, and many whose only duty is to say 'Amen' to the invocations and blessings of the principal. At least one Amen priest is required for every ceremony since the officiating priest cannot say 'Amen' to his own invocations, but any eligible person can go to ceremonies and be an Amen priest. In times of depression and

where the ceremonies are in big houses, as many as fifty 'Amen' priests have been known to be present. The officiating priest is paid a handsome fee, and the Amen priests are paid at the flat rate of half an anna per head. Generally, a high power of memory and a higher power of flattery are required from officiating priests in addition to a hereditary right to officiate. The same priest may be a principal at some ceremonies and an Amen priest at others. But there are some who are always Amen priests either through their inability to master the elaborate Sanskrit *mantras* or through their lack of hereditary right.

Kunchappu was one of these Amen priests and his greatest haul on any one day never exceeded three annas and two sumptuous meals though he might have attended as many as six ceremonies. On many days, a copper half-anna represented the sum-total of his earnings, and, on some days, even that miserable copper was absent. His wife, Lakshmi, noted this with growing sadness. 'Dearest,' said she, 'if I were you, I would never be content with being an Amen priest. I should like to officiate at ceremonies. It is not a question of your lack of hereditary right, for you know, as well as I do, that you possess it. Then why not mug up the

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mantras and have a try? Your miserable coppers do not suffice even to keep me alive. Then what about the little dears who will crop up in future years?' Kunchappu took his wife's advice to heart, and soon learnt all the *mantras* by rote. He had been already familiar with them, having heard them repeated hundreds of times by the officiating priests.

After mastering the *mantras*, he got an engagement to officiate at a marriage, to the great envy of the other Amen priests and the unconcealed jealousy of the other officiating priests of the locality. Kunchappu began well. In faultless Sanskrit, he invoked the blessings of the gods on the holy fire he kindled for offering oblations. 'May the gods of fire, air and water, the divine Agni, Vayu and Varuna bless this fire!' said he, and, forgetting himself, said immediately after 'Amen.' The practice of years was too much for poor Kunchappu. Always he had said 'Amen' on hearing this *mantra*, and the familiar sounds had produced the same results this day. The assembled Amen priests and the laymen were horror-struck. The undoable thing had been done. Poor Kunchappu was driven out by the indignant house-holder, and the whole ceremony begun over again. Kunchappu met his wife with

a hang-dog look on his face and said, 'Dearest, the whole thing miscarried.' 'What else will it do with a man like you?' she asked. 'You have handled coppers too long to handle gold or silver. Turn to your coppers again.' And Kunchappu again became an Amen priest, this time for good.

CXI. TIPPU OUTFLANKED

WHEN Tippu, the famous Sultan of Mysore, invaded Malabar and defeated its rulers, he razed down as many Hindu temples as he could and made thousands of forced conversions to Islam. With the stones of eight thousand temples, he constructed the famous fort at Palghat. There, one day, he had all the Brahmins of the Taluk brought before him by his soldiers. Tippu asked them to choose between the sword and Islam. All the unfortunates, numbering several hundreds, preferred to embrace Islam than face death. The Sultan at once ordered that the heads of all should be completely shaven and all made to eat beef curry in order to make a lapse back to Hinduism impossible. There were only six barbers available for shaving these hundreds, and the beef curry also was limited in quantity. So, the barbers shaved one lock of each convert and

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kept him waiting for the full shave. The distributors of curry also gave only a spoonful to each. One of the Brahmins brought was a cunning man. He wanted to outflank Tippu and escape both Islam and the sword. So he went to a barber rudely elbowing his way through the dense crowd and, shaking the barber's shoulder, bawled out, 'Fellow, shave my head clean at once. Let these unwilling wretches wait. I come to Islam with a free will. I want to go to the mosque at once. Allah-ho-Akbar!'

The barber was terribly put out, and thrust the man away, saying, 'You shall not be shaved to-day.' Tippu's soldiers were so sure of the Brahmin's becoming a Muslim that they let him go, on his saying, 'Then I shall eat the beef curry and come.' The Brahmin went to the distributors of beef curry, who were surrounded by even a denser crowd than the barbers, for the old Muslims also were competing with the converts for the curry. He pushed many, and, going to the distributors, bawled out to them 'Fellows, give me a full plate of the curry and not a miserable spoonful. I want to go and get myself shaved. Allah-ho-Akbar!' All the persons were wroth at his behaviour, 'you shall have no beef-curry at all you pig,' they said, and

drove him out of the precincts. The Brahmin thus escaped both Islam and the sword and did not stop till he reached home; and from there he fled to Travancore, then the secure and hospitable asylum of all Hindu refugees.

CXII. THE BRAHMIN'S RUSE

YAMAPURI was a petty Zemindari. But its owner was bent upon being called the Raja of Yamapuri. Anybody in Yamapuri who dared to refuse him that title or to refer to him as the Zemindar of Yamapuri had his house promptly burnt by the rowdies under the Zemindar's control.

A Brahmin had recently settled in Yamapuri. He was a retired government clerk and had no respect for titles not recognized by government. So he persisted in referring to the Zemindar as the Zemindar of Yamapuri. He was warned about the consequences, but paid no heed. So, one dark night, his house was burnt down by the Zemindar's men. All his cries for help were of no avail as none of the neighbours would raise a little finger to aid him. The house was entirely burnt down, and the men departed leaving the Brahmin, his wife and children homeless and warning him to be more

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careful in future when speaking of royal personages.

The Brahmin understood the situation in a second. He smiled to himself to the astonishment of all the neighbours. He borrowed a piece of paper, a cover, a pen and ink and wrote a letter like this:—

‘Your Imperial Highness’s humble slave’s house was last night burnt down by a band of ruffians, the enemies of God, Your Imperial Highness and Your humble slave. The villains had the audacity to pretend that they were the agents of Your Imperial Highness, not knowing that your humble slave knows that nothing evil will ever emanate from such an exalted person. Your humble slave’s request is that as a lesson to all your Imperial Highness’s enemies and as a monument of Your Imperial Highness’s unbounded wealth and generosity, Your Imperial Highness be pleased to order your humble slave’s house to be built with four-fold splendour.

With all the blessings of all the gods in Heaven,

Your humble slave,

JAMBUNATHAN,

Retired Clerk, Yamapuri.’

Then Jambunathan put the letter into the cover and addressed it to 'His Imperial Highness, The Maharajadhiraja of Yamapuri.' A month after this letter was despatched, Jambunathan's house had been rebuilt with four-fold splendour.

CXIII. PUSHPAPURA¹ AND PAVIZHAPURA²

PUSHPAPURA and Pavizhapura were neighbouring Zemindaries. Pavizhapura was a far richer one than Pushpapura, and the ambition of the Zemindar of Pushpapura was to ape all the doings of the Zemindar of Pavizhapura. The Pushpapura Zemindar had a favourite called Kanaka who was the supplier of intelligence as regards the doings in Pavizhapura.

'Kanaka,' said his master one day to him, 'what are they doing at Pavizhapura to-day?'

'Having a cock-fight, your lordship,' replied Kanaka.

'Bring six cocks at once and let us have a cock-fight,' said the Zemindar, and this was done.

'Kanaka,' said the Zemindar the next day, 'what are they doing at Pavizhapura to-day?'

'Having races among children,' said Kanaka.

¹ The city of flowers.

² The city of corals.

‘Bring some children at once and let us have a race too,’ said the Zemindar, and this was done.

‘Kanaka,’ said the Zemindar the third day, ‘what are they doing at Pavizhapura to-day?’

‘Beginning to build a school costing forty thousand rupees,’ replied Kanaka.

‘Good God! We cannot do that,’ exclaimed the Zemindar of Pushpapura. ‘Pavizhapura is Pavizhapura and Pushpapura is Pushpapura, and there is a definite limit to the extent to which Pushpapura can imitate Pavizhapura.’

‘It took the fool so long to find out that,’ said Kanaka laughing to his cronies in the kitchen.

CXIV. A WIFE’S DEVICE

AN intelligent and virtuous wife used to counsel her obstinate and dull husband on what he should do. He, however, had the false dignity of being a man, and thought it a degradation to listen to a woman’s advice. ‘Listen to my advice,’ said his wife often and often. ‘Never’ would be his invariable reply. And he did many foolish and wicked things disregarding his wife’s advice. One day, she asked him, ‘Dearest, won’t you do as I tell you? You seem to have sworn to do the exact opposite of what I tell you.’ ‘Yes, I

shall swear it again in your presence if you want,' said the husband. 'Do so, then. Who can prevent a man from ruining himself if he is so inclined?' she replied. The husband then and there swore with a gusto, calling all the gods to witness, that thereafter he would do the exact opposite of what his wife advised him to do. Thereafter, his wife told him to do the exact opposite of what she really wanted him to do, and he did with a gusto what she really wanted him to do. Thus, the intelligent one prevailed at last.

· CXV. CHANAKYA AND FIREWOOD

CHANAKYA, the famous minister of the great Maurya Emperor Chandragupta, used to scrutinize even the expenditure of firewood in the emperor's kitchen. A certain quantity was weighed and given, and if more was wanted the minister's permission was necessary. One of the courtiers was disgusted at what he considered the mean conduct of the prime minister, and so went to Chanakya one day and told him that it was a great scandal that a great emperor like Chandragupta should have even his supply of firewood for the kitchen restricted.

‘Wherein is Chandragupta a great emperor?’ asked Chanakya.

‘Because of his mighty empire covering the whole of Bharatavarsha¹ from the Himalayas to the sea,’ replied the courtier. ‘How does His Imperial Majesty get his income?’ asked Chanakya.

‘From his revenues,’ replied the courtier.

‘From whom are the revenues derived?’ asked the prime minister.

‘From the ryots,’ replied the courtier.

‘Will a ryot waste firewood?’ asked Chanakya.

‘Of course, not,’ said the courtier. ‘The wretched fellow will go a mile to pick up a dry twig, and will save even the charcoal for further use.’

‘When that is so,’ said Chanakya, ‘how can His Imperial Majesty, who is but the trustee of the revenues derived from such ryots, be allowed to waste firewood?’ The courtier retired in confusion.

CXVI. CHANAKYA AND ASSASSINS

‘How, oh Chanakya, can you justify the use of assassins against enemy princes?’ asked the palace priest.

¹ India.

‘In three ways,’ said Chanakya. ‘Firstly, because those enemy princes use them, and you have to use your enemy’s weapons and something more if you are to succeed in war. Thus, the foolish Poros was defeated because he did not adopt his enemy’s weapon of sudden and unexpected attack, but believed in giving fair warning before beginning an attack. Secondly, when assassination is resorted to, only one man dies, and not thousands as in war. Thirdly, no disturbance takes place in agriculture and trade as when a war is in progress. Morality, oh priest, has little place in politics. I, who would not kill an ant for my private gain, will not scruple to kill thousands for the sake of my king and country. Swords cannot be met by sermons, for swords clash only when sermons have failed.’

CXVII. CHANAKYA AND ANVIKSHAKI ¹

‘WHY, oh Chanakya, have you put anvikshaki first in your *Arthasastra* ² though you yourself are primarily concerned with economics and politics?’ asked a friend. ‘Economics and politics are means to anvikshaki,’ replied Chanakya.

¹ *Atmavidya* or the science of knowing oneself with a view to attain salvation.

² Chanakya’s famous book on Economics and Politics.

' The starving man in search of food has neither the time nor the inclination to know himself and attain salvation. Lower cravings always pull him earthwards and unfit his mind and soul for the spiritual flight of anvikshaki. So also, the man who is not living in a well-ordered state is in perpetual fear for his life, and his mind too hovers round the earth and is unfitted for the spiritual flight of anvikshaki. A reasonably full belly and fairly absolute safety are essential for anvikshaki. That is why our kings feed and protect the Brahmins in order that these may practise anvikshaki. But economics and politics are but means for the end, namely anvikshaki, just as anvikshaki itself is but a means for attaining salvation. No one can attain an end without thinking out the means. And so, I too was forced to discuss economics and politics when considering the question of anvikshaki which I consider to be far more important than economics or politics, just as I hold salvation to be far more important than anvikshaki. '

CXVIII. THE MISCHIEF A DOUBT DID

TWO friends, Mani and Guru, were walking together along a road with a view to catch a bus. Soon a bus came rattling along, and Guru, who was

experienced at getting into buses, jumped into it by catching hold of the rail even though the bus was in motion. The bus stopped a hundred yards ahead, but, before Mani could catch it up, it was again in motion. Seeing his friend left behind, Guru jumped off the bus, and, coming back to where Mani was, asked him why he had not caught the bus while running at half speed. 'It is dangerous,' said Mani.

'Pooh!' said Guru, 'I have done it hundreds of times and have never once come to grief.'

'Yes, but once you may catch it and lose your life or limb. Who knows when that will be? It is all well to boast now, but there will be no boasting then.'

'Pooh!' said Guru and laughed. But next time when he sprang to catch hold of the rail of a running bus with a view to jump into it as usual, Mani's words came to his mind causing a slight nervousness which made him fall down and injure himself. 'Dash the fellow!' said Guru as he embraced Mother Earth, 'his doubt has ruined me.'

CXIX. THE ODD HORSE

A ZEMINDAR living in a country town bought a new 7 H.P. two-seater car. He took great pride

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in it and invited his up-country cousin and showed the car to him. The cousin had never seen a car before, and admired it much. §

‘It is 7 H.P.,’ said the country town Zemindar proudly. ‘Brother,’ returned the other, ‘it would have been better had it been 8 H.P.’

‘True,’ said the first, ‘but, for our purposes, 7 H.P. is quite enough. Why, what is the difficulty you have in view?’ ‘Where are we to tie the odd horse, and will it go well without a companion?’ was the reply.

CXX. A PHILOSOPHER’S STRANGE ACT

A PHILOSOPHER disgusted with the endless wrangles of the Madhadhipathis ¹ and Jagatgurus ² among themselves for securing higher thrones and seats than the others, wanted to teach them a lesson. So, one day, when a great festival at a big temple with a mighty tower was in progress and all the Madhadhipathis and Jagatgurus were just about to enter the temple, the philosopher clambered up to the very top of the tower and sat there to the great amusement of the boys and the wonder of the grown-up people including the Madhadhipathis

¹ Heads of monasteries.

² Religious heads ; literally, world-preceptors.

and Jagatgurus. . He was made to climb down. Then the holy men asked him why he had sat on the top of the tower. He replied that it was to attain spiritual benefit by being nearer to God. 'What a foolish idea!' said the Madhadhipathis and Jagatgurus all together, 'will mere physical height bring you nearer to God?'

'Your holinesses are all intent on only spiritual things and yet fight for higher and higher seats. So I thought that a mere difference of a few feet in physical height did take us nearer to God,' replied the philosopher naively.

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